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**REPRESENTATION of POWER RELATIONS IN DAYTIME TELEVISION  
IN TURKEY: THE CASES of *GELİNİM MUTFAKTA* and *ZUHAL TOPAL'LA  
SOFRADA***

**Öykü TEOMAN  
118603009**

**Dr. Öğretim Üyesi Ayşegül KESİRLİ UNUR**

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**İKTİDAR İLİŞKİLERİNİN TÜRKİYE GÜNDÜZ KUŞAĞI TELEVİZYONUNDA  
TEMSİLİ: *GELİNİM MUTFAKTA* ve *ZUHAL TOPAL'LA SOFRADA* ÖRNEĞİ**

Öykü TEOMAN

118603009

**Tez Danışmanı:** Dr. Öğr. Üyesi Ayşegül Kesirli Unur (İmza) .....  
İstanbul Bilgi Üniversitesi

**Jüri Üyeleri:** Dr. Öğr. Üyesi Ebru Çiğdem (İmza) .....  
Thwaites Diken  
İstanbul Bilgi Üniversitesi

Dr. Öğr. Üyesi Feyda Sayan Cengiz (İmza) .....  
Manisa Celal Bayar Üniversitesi

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## ABSTRACT

Daytime television was originally designed and structured to accompany ‘housewives’ on their domestic tasks. In a similar vein, daytime television in Turkey is still dominated by shows that put domestic life and intra-familial relationships into their focus. Among these contemporary media productions, however, one specific trend comes to the fore in particular: cooking competitions between in-laws. Accordingly, in this thesis the power dynamics between mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law represented in two daytime shows broadcast on private channels FOX and Kanal D, *Zuhal Topal’la Sofrada* (At the Dinner with Zuhal Topal) and *Gelinim Mutfakta* (My Daughter-in-Law in the Kitchen) are analyzed by drawing on the Foucauldian conceptualization of ‘power’ and his understanding of ‘family’ as a site of power. These two shows take advantage of the stereotypes about this relationship while the formats resembling cooking shows revolve around four or five in-law pairs competing against each other based on the one immutable rule: daughters-in-law cook, and mothers-in-law eat and grade. Although mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law compete together in teams, the narrative of these shows highlights conflicts between them instead of companionship and points to a certain hierarchy between the pair. Despite the formats’ discourse, however, these daytime shows, with their rather unpolished narratives and diversified participants, generate new discussions about class, family and gender dynamics in Turkey while embodying unconventional power dynamics where traditional gender roles and intra-familial hierarchies are subverted. This study aspires to contribute to the emerging scholarship about daytime practices and contemporary gender discourses in Turkey.

**Keywords:** daytime television, mothers-in-law, daughters-in-law, power, discourse

## ÖZET

Gündüz kuşağı, televizyonun ilk yıllarında ‘ev hanımlarına’ ev işlerinde eşlik etmek üzere tasarlanmıştır. Benzer bir şekilde, Türkiye’nin gündüz kuşağına bakıldığında, ev işleri ve aile hayatına odaklanan programların hakimiyeti göze batar. Ancak bütün bu programlar arasında kendine has bir akım öne çıkmaktadır: gelin-kayınvalide yemek yarışmaları. Bu çalışmanın amacı gelin ve kayınvalideler arasındaki iktidar ilişkilerinin, FOX ve Kanal D kanallarının gündüz kuşaklarında yayınlanan *Zuhal Topal’la Mutfakta* ve *Gelinim Mutfakta* programlarındaki temsilini incelemektir. Çalışmada, Foucault’nun iktidar kavramından ve yine kendisinin aileyi bir iktidar alanı olarak tanımlamasından yola çıkılmıştır. Her ne kadar yemek yarışmaları olarak sunulsa da bu iki program gelin-kayınvalide ilişkisi hakkındaki genel klişelere dayanmakta ve gelinlerin kayınvalideleri için yemek yaptığı, kayınvalidelerin ise onları yönettiği ve değerlendirdiği anlatılar sunmaktadır. Kayınvalideler ve gelinlerin takımlar halinde birlikte yarışıyor olmalarına rağmen, bu programların anlatımları aralarındaki birliktelik ve ortaklıktansa çatışmaları vurgulamaktadır. Ancak formatın söylemine karşılık bu gündüz kuşağı programları, oldukça sade anlatımları ve son derece çeşitli katılımcıları ile Türkiye’de sınıf, aile ve cinsiyet dinamikleri hakkında yeni tartışmalar üretmekte ve geleneksel toplumsal cinsiyet rolleri ile aile içi dinamiklere dair söylemleri altüst etmektedir. Bu tez, Türkiye’de gündüz kuşağı televizyonu pratikleri ve toplumsal cinsiyet söylemleri arasındaki ilişki hakkında ortaya konulan çalışmalara katkıda bulunmayı amaçlamaktadır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** gündüz kuşağı, televizyon, gelin-kaynana, iktidar, söylem

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## INTRODUCTION

Daytime schedule in Turkey is strangely fascinated with the intra-familial relationships and the domestic life. If a person is to take the remote control on their hands in Turkey during the daytime and to zap through the channels, the images of people -most of whom are females- cooking and cleaning will blend with the images of various family members in conflict. This fascination with the domestic and the familial can't be solely based on the assumption regarding the daytime audience's gender. Although the daytime schedule of many other countries target a female audience as it was designed for accompanying the housewives on her domestic chores in the formative years of television (Spigel, 1992) the current situation in Turkey seems different. In Turkey, the daytime schedule came to be a public platform where intra-familial matters which were formerly concealed in the private sphere are discussed openly and loudly. The case studies of this thesis, *Gelinim Mutfakta* (My Daughter-in-Law in the Kitchen, Kanal D, 2018-) and *Zuhal Topal'la Sofrada* (At the Dinner with Zuhal Topal, Fox TV, 2018-) despite being presented as cooking competition shows are a part of this tradition as evident from their common focus which is the relationship between mothers-in-law (MILs) and daughters-in-law (DILs)<sup>1</sup>.

This thesis was written in the middle of the Covid-19 outbreak which transformed the social order in a way that is yet to be explained. In the early stages of the pandemic, the discourse on how the work-life has stopped because of the Covid-19 was criticized for ignoring the domestic work usually imputed on the women in the households which was even increased let alone being stopped (Aygüneş & Ok, 2020). As the production

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<sup>1</sup> While the Turkish words for mother-in-law and daughter in-law, *kayınvalide* -or *kaynana* which is more informal- and *gelin* respectively, are rather short, the English words designated for this relationship are too lengthy. So MIL and DIL will be used as the abridgments of these words throughout this thesis.

of many TV series were cancelled due to the public health measures, I was worried for the possibility of the daytime shows which was the case studies of this thesis being cancelled as well. Daytime reality shows however nearly never took a break from shooting. While there were news headlines on how the television industry had stopped, the daytime screens during the pandemic, was full of new episodes of competition shows where the contestants are seen cleaning, cooking and decorating. Similar to the domestic work being ignored by the public discourse, these shows that imitate the domestic realm were ignored when the effect of the pandemic on the television industry was discussed.

This disregard can be read in relation to both reality and daytime television's "pejoratively gendered position in a clearly articulated hierarchy of aesthetics that has been both established and maintained through centuries of tradition grounded in the codes of domination and privilege" (Weber, 2012, p. 16). These shows were critically disdained and deemed as insignificant by the hierarchy of aesthetics. This critical disdain stems also from its perception as "trivial", "commercial" and "emotional," in opposition to other factual television forms which were perceived to be "serious" and "objective" (Holmes & Jermyn, 2004). These dichotomies are highly related to gender because of their implicit connotations with femininity and masculinity, subordinate and superordinate.

*Gelinim Mutfakta* and *Zuhal Topal'la Sofrada* are two of the many daytime shows that went on despite the pandemic. Despite being in-law cooking competition shows, the format twist is that in both shows, the DILs are the ones who cook while the MILs are the ones judging them. Narrative of these shows heavily rely on the idiosyncrasy of this relationship in the Turkish culture and the stereotypical conflicts between them. While the relationship between MIL and DIL is advised to resemble to a mother-daughter one, it is portrayed to be a highly conflicting relationship in popular culture.

Before the analysis of these shows, a brief summary of Western television studies is given in the first chapter in order to explain the concepts regarding the genre and format of the shows. In the second chapter, how the relationship between the pair is positioned in the Turkish culture will be explained in relation to the contemporary discourse on gender and family regimes of the government ruled by *Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi* (AKP)<sup>2</sup> since 2002. ‘Family values’ has become a discursive trademark of the AKP and ever since the early years of their rule, in an attempt to utilize family as an institution that is economically profitable and an efficient tool to govern the society. A brief account of AKP’s policies regarding gender and family is given in this chapter in order to understand how the representations of intra-familial relationships are related to family regimes and biopolitics of the AKP government, especially the relations between MILs and DILs.

The third chapter consists of the analyses of the two television shows from a discourse-analytical perspective in order to reveal how the power is positioned in this relationship. However, as the formats itself constitute a discourse system, the power structure of the shows are taken into consideration as much as the individual dynamics between the pairs.

These two shows were analyzed as different cases as despite their common ground of being MIL-DIL cooking competition shows, their formats and structures are quite different. In addition, they air in different time slots of daytime television. So in order to make a proper analysis accordingly to these different format elements, the two shows were analyzed separately but under similar headings. The hosts, the formats and the contestants with their intersection of power dynamics and relations to each other were all analyzed.

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<sup>2</sup> Justice and Development Party in English.

Although a considerable amount of work about gender dynamics of the daytime schedule in Turkey is present, they were mostly concerned with the marriage shows which were cancelled by an emergency decree in 2017. Those marriage shows, despite being absent from the current daytime schedule of Turkey had affected the formats that came after them immensely. What makes daytime schedule worthy of analysis is that it offers a variety of unpolished and rather less edited narrations to understand how gender is presented, performed and reproduced. This thesis aims to contribute to the body of work produced about the interrelation between the daytime practices and contemporary discourses regarding gender and family in Turkey.

## CHAPTER 1: TELEVISION AND GENDER

### 1.1. Western Television Studies

#### 1.1.1. A Brief History

Since its entrance into households, television became a rather controversial medium. Compared to its precursor cinema, it was considered as a lower form of entertainment by many. Some media scholars feared that as a result of the light entertainment that is presented, television would decline the culture and turn the public into an unaware and easily controlled mass. For example, in his influential work *Amusing Ourselves to Death*, Neil Postman (1986) argued that the presentation of serious topics like politics and news in the visual form, would reduce these topics to mere entertainment and destroy the “serious and rational public discussion” maintained by the printing press. In his paper titled *How to Look at Television*, Adorno (1954), a member of the Frankfurt School of Social Research, analyzed the show programs on the new medium in order to reveal the hidden “messages” in them. While interpreting those hidden messages and their effects, Adorno (1954) referred to the “spectator”. This spectator was an entity assumed to perceive the messages conveyed by television in the one single possible way.

Pierre Bourdieu’s theory on “taste” and how it is directly related to cultural capital and therefor an important example of cultural hegemony, provided a very useful conceptual framework for studies about television. His use of surveys as a method for analysis was especially groundbreaking due to its quantitative approach. In addition to this indirect impact, in *On Television*, Bourdieu (1999) himself expressed his own concerns about the medium including the lack of autonomy for the viewers and imposition of unity and banality on the part of the market.

The early period of television studies was mostly concerned with the effect instead of the narrative style. According to Lewis, the research on this period was characterized by audience research (as cited in Çelenk, 2005, p. 37). Although approaches varied, the common consensus was that television was an effective and powerful tool to convey messages (Çelenk, 2005, p. 37). One of the main concerns was about violence shown on screen and whether it was as effective as to encourage violent behavior in daily life. Anyhow, the early studies on this subject revealed that audiences were in fact not passive detectors who were perceiving the messages in an intended way (Casey et al., 2008, p. 24). By the late 1950s a new approach called “uses and gratifications” was developed. This approach was more interested in the audience itself than the message. It recognized audiences as active agents in the process of interpretation and a heterogeneous population with different needs and motivations. The approach also served the commercial media industry by dividing audiences into more developed categories. These new categories meant that the advertisement slots could now be arranged according to the needs of the specific consumer groups (Casey et al., 2008).

Towards the end of the 1970s, audience research began to lose its prominence in media studies and a more text-based approach became prevalent. Television shows were now discussed as texts that needed to be approached from a critical perspective to decipher the hidden ideologies and meanings (Çelenk, 2005). Fiske and Hartley’s (2003) *Reading Television* was one of the first studies that suggest looking at television shows as if they were literary texts. The question of whether those texts were worthy enough to be discussed in the academic realm was no longer valid thanks to Roland Barthes’ (1993) influential works that applied semiotics to the contents of popular culture. Following Fiske and Hartley’s (2003) pioneer work, semiotics and other textual methodologies such as genre, ideology and narrative theory were now being used to decode the television texts. *Television Culture*, another book by Fiske (2011), brought

these theoretical approaches together and became an essential textbook for television studies. In this book, Fiske also demonstrated how the interpretation of television texts can vary among different people (Creeber, 2006). People brought their background, gender, and race to the table while interpreting what they saw on the screen. The cultural studies' impact on television studies, was also apparent. Morley's (1980) *The Nationwide Audience*, for example, applied an ethnographic approach while examining the television viewing practices at households. Thus an investigation about the consumption of television contents and its relation to power dynamics in the family began.

### **1.1.2. Feminism and Television Studies**

Feminist research was another field that contributed to the further development of television studies. The presupposition of the feminist scholars was that gender was a social construction instead of a biological condition. The patriarchal ideology was blamed for utilizing media to silence and exclude women. With this "deep conviction that women's oppression was very much related to mass media representation" (Brunsdon et al., 1997), the early feminist research on television was concerned with how women were represented and gender was (re)produced on television. Pioneer studies on gender like Butler's (2006) *Gender Trouble* and Connell's (1987) *Gender and Power* influenced the feminist criticism of television and the concepts and frameworks were applied to television texts and formats.

Daytime genres such as soap opera were more prominent subjects of feminist research as due to their scheduling they were assumed to address women. In *Daytime Television: You'll Never Want to Leave Home*, Aschur (1976) analyzed the daytime game shows and soap operas in the U.S. broadcast channels to reveal how women and men were portrayed. After illustrating how the soap opera family portrayed the idealized lives of

families economically headed by professional men while most women were housewives, she remarked how the husbands in those “ideal” families were portrayed mostly as protective and giving but never as disciplinarian or wife beaters (Aschur, 1976). Although the relationships between men and women were portrayed to be more equal than in real life or other television formats, she argued that those portrayals function to idealize the patriarchal order and confine women further into the households (Aschur, 1976). There were other studies about soap operas in which the discussion went beyond the text and the methods used were built on other disciplines. Modleski (1981, as cited in Kaplan, 1992), for example, revealed that how the rhythm of soap operas harmonized women’s daily work in the households with an interruptible, multiple narrative structure. Taking advantage of psychoanalysis, she also theorized that soap operas tend to create a different kind of relationship between spectator and characters where the boundaries that separate them disappear, resulting in overidentification (Kaplan, 1992, p. 199). Flitterman-Lewis (1983, as cited in Kaplan, 1992) using semiotics, examined the relationship between soap operas and commercials and revealed that instead of interrupting the narrative flow of the daytime soap opera, commercials could be seen to continue it. Brunson (1983, as cited in Kaplan, 1992, p. 200) drawing on Foucauldian discourse theory, discovered how soap operas were concerned with “constructing a moral consensus about the conduct of personal life.” Evident from the program publicity, scheduling, and ads, soap operas refer to a female spectator who is assumed to have the responsibility for managing the sphere of personal life (Kaplan, 1992).

In addition to its criticism of television, feminism also became a context for television productions. D’Acci (1994) revealed how in the 1970s the middle-class career women were discovered as a new demographic by the U.S. television industry. Coinciding with the Women’s Right Movement of the 1960s and 1970s, television networks were quick to create feminist programming that will attract the ‘liberated women’. Shows that

revolve around women who were in professional life, divorced, or simply 'not ideal' such as *The Mary Tayler Moore Show*, *Maude*, *Cagney & Lacey*, *Julia*, *One Day at A Time* and *Rosanne* emerged. Although it was a promising development, these feminist shows, too, couldn't escape the scrutiny of feminist scholars. They were concerned about how feminism was represented and institutionalized by televisual practices. D'Acci, for example, in her detailed analysis of *Cagney & Lacey*, a prime-time drama about two female detectives, expressed that despite the efforts of women and feminists involved in the production of the show, it had problematic practices from a feminist perspective such as "the 'feminization' of the characters on the level of their bodies, (..) 'victimization' of the protagonists" and "the diminution of explicit feminism" (1994, p. 209).

Towards the end of the 1990s, post-feminist television shows emerging in American networks like *Ally McBeal*, *Friends*, and *Sex and the City* became prominently discussed subjects of feminist television criticism. It was apparent that feminism was becoming a lifestyle and an attitude instead of a political stance. There were competing discourses about what it means to be a feminist. Issues of sexual desire and pleasure, motherhood, subjectivity, and identity were interrogated both by post-feminist characters of television and feminist scholars who were discussing them. According to McCabe and Akass, "criticism became a form of activism allowing multiple voices and contesting opinions to co-exist in an unpredictable alliance" (2006, p. 114). And the feminist television criticism is continuing to adapt to the new televisual practices of storytelling including digital, online, and participative.

### **1.1.3. Daytime Television and Gender**

As stated above, daytime shows were prominent subjects for feminist television criticism. Its prominence derives from the fact that the daytime schedule was designed and structured by the early television industry with a female audience in mind. Traditionally, the daytime refers to a time slot that begins as early as 09:00 in the morning and lasts until 19:00, the beginning of the primetime.

As television was promoted to be a medium for family entertainment initially, it was positioned in the living room to be watched by the whole family. Women's imperative admission to professional life as a result of the second world war shifted the gender dynamics immensely. Although their admission was accepted as necessitous due to the social climate of the Second World War, they were expected to return to the domestic sphere when the war ended. Many women's refusal to do so and an already tumbled patriarchal order elicited an aggressive discourse concerning domesticity and family. Spigel (1992) in her pioneer work *Make Room for TV*, examined television's entrance into the family space and how it became a central piece of family life in post-war America. While primetime and weekend schedule targeted the whole family -but especially the father as he was assumed to hold the power to decide on which program will be viewed- daytime targeted the housewife after her husband went to work and her children to school. As this target female audience had domestic duties to perform, daytime programming could not be distracting. Instead, daytime was designed to accommodate the housewife in her domestic chores. The early daytime variety shows in the American broadcast channels even mimicked the supposed domestic workflow by consisting of segments such as gardening, cooking, cleaning, etc. Spigel (1992) noted how the women seen on daytime screens were always working similarly to the presumed spectator who was working while watching as well. These shows also served as commercial spots as women were also assumed to be executors of the family budget

planning even though men were assumed to earn money. Presenters and segment guests often promoted home appliances which promised to make the housewives' domestic chores easier (Spigel, 1992).

In addition to being targeted by daytime programming women also found more coverage in this schedule. From soap operas to talk shows, women -in a surprisingly diverse fashion- were preferred to address other women in the households. In terms of feminine presence, thus, daytime television out-innovated primetime and even cinema. This variation in representations was followed by variation in criticism surrounding them. Whereas Lopate (1976) argued that the family portrayed in the daytime soaps was an eroticized version which neglected the loneliness and isolation of the housewife caused by her confinement in the household, Cassidy in her archive research of the American daytime television in the 1950s, argued that the daytime schedule was a platform where hopes and disappointments of womanhood were performed and negotiated. She appreciated how these shows “dared to expose feminine discontentment” (2005, p. 215). Analyzing the public affairs programming of the same period, Leigh Goldstein (2014) took a similar stance to Cassidy's. She discussed that by addressing the “trapped housewife” these shows aspired to be a cure to the isolation and depression of post-war American women (Goldstein, 2014). The daytime, in this context was much more than a tool to entrap women into the domestic space. Although celebrating these programs as being feminist would be going too far, they were not the feminist nightmares that they were assumed to be either. What was special about daytime television was this ambiguity itself. Like Kay (2014) revealed in her examination of a British daytime magazine program of the 1970s, in the concept of ‘women's programming’, “subversive, feminist content co-existed with more traditional, conservative appeals to ‘womanhood’.” In daytime television, it is possible that “patriarchal gender relations to be subverted and re-inscribed, often at the same time and within the same text” (Kay, 2014).

## 1.2. Daytime Television in Turkey

Turkey's television history begins with the monopoly of the public service broadcaster TRT (Turkish Radio and Television). From its foundation in 1964 till 1990s TRT and its subsequent channels like TRT2 and TRT3 were the only options, therefore, only efficient media resources in the country. Similar to its international counterparts, daytime television in Turkey was also designed with the assumption of a female audience. Therefore besides the educational programming, women programs held an important place in TRT's daytime schedule. In 1972, *Kadın ve Evi* (Woman and Her Home) was the first woman's show with its woman's magazine-like flow consisting of sections such as, meal preparation, home decoration, fashion and beauty. Following this, other woman's shows were introduced in the public service broadcaster such as, *Kadının Dünyası* (Woman's World) and *Kadın ve Aile* (Woman and Family) (Gün, 2006, p. 47) As apparent even by their names, these daytime shows were only dealing with women's domestic duties and their routines in the households.

Although the 1980 military coup was effective on changing TRT's broadcasting styles and subsequently its daytime schedule (Öztürk, 1987, as cited in Gün, 2006), it was the introduction of private channels in the beginning of the 1990s which transformed the daytime television and resulted in creation of the daytime schedule as we know today. Thanks to the large number of television channels broadcasting, daytime schedule of Turkey offers a fruitful and idiosyncratic stream consisting of formats varying from morning shows and soaps to reality crime shows.

The morning show format, one of the formats that was introduced by the private channels, dominated the daytime slot in the late 1990s and early 2000s. Usually helmed by female singers, this format was carrying elements from both variety shows and talk shows resulting in an hybrid form. The flow of these shows included sections such as

cooking and makeover, singing performances of celebrity guests to which the studio audiences danced from their seats and non-celebrity guests who came to tell their tragic life stories to which the whole studio cried together. The morning show hosts were defined by the intimate and candid communication they formed with the audiences which was very different than what was accustomed during the monopoly of TRT. Whereas the TRT presenters were speaking<sup>3</sup> in a very formal way with perfect articulations, the morning show hosts were using slang and addressing both studio guests and audiences at home in a very casual way, resulting in a kin-like affinity with them. The hybrid narratives of these shows where one minute the whole studio was crying about a sad life story and the next minute they were all dancing joyfully to a play-back performance transformed the daytime scene of Turkey and influenced the subsequent formats indisputably.

The reality crime show format which is accepted as the first local reality television productions by television scholars today is another important format in Turkey's television broadcast history. The first examples of this local format that were broadcast on primetime including *Sıcağı Sıcağına*, *Olay Olay* and *Gerçek Kesit*, faced a similar critical disapproval to international reality shows when they first emerged in 1993. They were disdained for their estrangement from journalism practices through explicit display of gore and violence resulting from a market logic and hosts acting like detectives. Despite criticism, these programs had a strange cooperation with Turkish police forces meaning that they had access to radio news and inside information (Çelenk, 2005, p. 211-212). At the time of writing this thesis, *Müge Anlı ile Tatlı Sert* –one of the many new versions of reality crime shows- still holds its top ten position in ratings and its host Müge Anlı was chosen as Turkey's second most trustworthy celebrity with 61,4 percent (Bir Gün, 2020) The strange relationship with the state's

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<sup>3</sup> This type of speech came to be referred as the 'TRT Turkish' later on.

security forces is still relevant in these new versions as is seen from regular participations of retired police officers and hosts' interrogating attitude.

Another famous daytime format was the marriage shows which will be discussed in detail in the second chapter. These shows until their cancellation by an emergency decree in 2017 was a staple of daytime schedule in Turkey. Their popularity made them one of the most studied subjects by television scholars in Turkey. In addition to their domination of the daytime schedule, they were also important for influencing the successor shows in terms of subject and style and therefore very deserving of the academic attention they got. The marriage shows together with its predecessors and successors transformed the daytime schedule of Turkey into a public platform where subjects previously secluded to private sphere such as marriage and familial relationships are discussed in the reality television format.

### **1.3. Studying Reality Television from the Perspective of Gender**

Although its roots can be traced to older factual television and film genres, the reality television as we came to know today became prominent in the beginning of the 2000s, partly thanks to the globally acclaimed formats such as *Survivor*. Although it is highly influenced by factual conventions of journalism, documentary, and video diaries, reality television genre carries plot elements from entertainment genres such as soap operas, sitcoms, dramas and game shows resulting in a very hybrid type of television programming (Ouellette, 2017, p.1). Despite the name of the genre suggesting a certain degree of realness, it was agreed upon early on by television scholars that reality television does not represent and in fact doesn't claim to represent the 'real' (Weber, 2014). In reality television, fiction practices such as extensive editing, usage of production sets, music, conflict arcs blend perfectly with factual practices like confessionals and surveillance. Even if all the elements of reality television related to fiction are to be eliminated, participants' awareness of the fact that they are being

filmed for television results in a knowing performance on the part of participants. Yet, the contrast between authenticity and performance does not debilitate the relevance or reliability of reality TV texts. On the contrary, the whole premise, the main narrative of this genre emerges from the interplay of the real and the staged as Corner (2002) articulates. He uses the term “selving” to describe the central process whereby the “true selves” are seen to emerge and develop from underneath, and indeed through the “performed selves projected for us” (Corner, 2002). Despite dating back to seventeen years ago, his interpretation gives a decent explanation for the ever-mounting fascination with the clearly and visibly staged reality programming.

Performance value of reality television is also important for studying it from the perspective of gender. Butler’s (1990 as cited in Weber, 2014) pioneering theory of gender indicates that gender is performative in its nature meaning that it “earns intelligence through repeated and reiterated acting” (p .5). So according to this theory, gender’s “authenticity” comes merely from its “performativity.” This intra-relation with performance constitutes a common ground between gender and reality television which makes studying the two interrelatedly feasible and even crucial. Accordingly, reality television became a fruitful field for scholars to study and understand how gender is constructed and reproduced on screen through curated and repeated discourses and actions.

Defining reality television was also another issue for scholars who were studying it. As the name was used as an umbrella term for all types of factual entertainment programs, it was hard to give a brief definition of it or even attribute essential characteristics to it. Involvement of “ordinary people” instead of actors or performers, for example, may seem like an ostensible characteristic as the absence of actors is what makes the reality television shows affordable alternatives to big-budget television programs like series in the first place (Oulette, 2017; Skeggs & Wood, 2012). Yet celebrity reality television

programs like *Keeping Up with the Kardashians* or *The Osbournes* challenge this characteristic as the whole premise of this type of reality television shows are the involvement of these celebrities and the chance to have a peak at their non-ordinary lives. Those type of reality television programs were called celebrity docusoaps by critics. The hybridity of the reality television programs were usually blamed for the issue of definition and the subgenres were treated like a solution. However, Holmes and Jermyn suggest in the introduction of their book *Understanding Television* that these type of categorizations were indeed “act of discursive constructions” (2004, p. 7). Citing Dovey (2000), they state the term docusoap which they believe to be a journalistic invention, “intended to foreground the form’s ‘trivialization’ of the ‘serious’ project of documentary” (Holmes & Jermyn, 2004). Even though it was adapted rapidly by the television industry itself, “the term ‘docusoap’ almost became a term of abuse” which is used to attest the cultural value to those texts (Dovey, 2000, as cited in Holmes & Jermyn, 2004, p. 7). So, just like in the case of “docusoap”, even the naming of a subgenre could be used to devalue the text itself as insignificant and unworthy of further analysis.

This discursive formation of insignificance is also deeply related to gender. The “trashiness” of reality television “begins with a position of being pejoratively gendered, in that it occupies a subordinate role on a clearly articulated hierarchy of aesthetics that has been both established and maintained through centuries of tradition grounded in the codes of domination and privilege” (Weber, 2014, p.16). As mentioned before, while cinema was regarded as a medium for art, television was usually referred as an entertainment medium. Similar to this early hierarchical position of television in relation to film, reality television was dismissed as a valuable television text very early on by both scholars and critics, demoting it to an even lower position in the hierarchy of aesthetics. As Holmes and Jermyn (2004) noted, this critical disdain stems also from its perception as “trivial”, “commercial” and “emotional,” in opposition to other factual

television forms which were “serious” and “objective.” These dichotomies are highly related to gender because of their implicit connotations with femininity and masculinity, subordinate and superordinate. The referral of reality television participants as celebrities is another evidence to these connotations according to Weber (2014). She reveals that the distinction between the meanings of “fame” and “celebrity” is also gender-biased and classed in its naming. Fame is perceived to be a reward as a result of an extraordinary success in a field whereas celebrity is described as a person that entertains us (Weber, 2014). The reality television personalities, in that case, aren’t seen as worthy of fame but rather are performance workers who can remain valid only through their time on screen.

The time-slot in which reality television programs are screened offers another distinction which is highly related to the previous topic. From production value, to setting, participants and editing daytime reality television practices vary immensely from primetime’s. For example, primetime reality television programs such as *Survivor* use exotic, overseas locations as settings or docusoaps like *Keeping Up with the Kardashians* and *The Osbournes* follow a cast of celebrities through its course, in short, they have key factors which raise the production cost in the first place. In contrast to this, daytime reality television shows’ settings are usually undemanding studios, and their participants are ‘ordinary’ people. This distinction is overt in the case of cooking shows. Tasha Oren’s (2013) in-depth analysis of U.S. food television reveals, for example, how introduction of chef competition programs like *Top Chef*, *Hell’s Kitchen*, *MasterChef* -all primetime programs- resulted in a shift from the female-centered and domestic explanatory recipe formats to restaurant-set, highly charged professional competitions. It is important to note that the dichotomy of domestic and public, which was frequently discussed by feminist scholars in relation to the discourse of being gendered is also relevant for the case of reality television. In daytime schedule, it’s more possible to encounter a reality television format using a domestic settings such as

a studio resembling a living room or a kitchen, whereas in primetime even the house of the *Big Brother* is presented as a public space through filming practices and format discourse.

To sum up, what makes reality television texts practical for studying gender is not limited to its participants whose gender performances are overt results of gender codes, public discourse and overly used stereotypes about gender. Analyzing discursive practices surrounding it, how it was produced, aired, criticized and even how the subgenres of it were named offers eye opening revelations about how it is pejoratively gendered from the very beginning.

## CHAPTER 2: FAMILY AND POWER

### 2.1. Gender and Family Policies of the AKP Government

“Family values” has become a discursive trademark of the AKP since the early years of their rule (Kocamaner, 2018). Their overwhelming fascination with the private realm of family and positioning family as the ‘foundation of society’ derived from first, the institution of family’s economic profit and second it’s efficacy as a tool to govern.

Discourse of family has always held a prominent space in the public debates in Turkey. Family has been deployed as an emotional and romanticized unit by both the modernist elites and the conservatives to turn the nation into an ‘affective community’. In the early years of the republic, family was an essential part of the modernization project meaning that the new lifestyle was expected to be implemented in the households (Yılmaz, 2015, p. 373). So, family was always perceived as an important unit to govern and therefore it needed to be protected.

AKP’s emphasis on the family however can be said to be more interfering and transformative than protective. Former prime minister and current president, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan’s insistence on marrying early and having three children in order to strengthen the nation is an example of AKP’s concern for restoring the traditional family. Female sexuality and body has also been negotiated and tried to be controlled by many politicians who served under the party’s name as a discursive strategy (Cindoglu & Unal, 2016). As Yılmaz notes, the bio-political policies and discourses implemented by AKP re-politicizes female body by reassigning women as sacred mothers that need to be protected and their bodies as “decisive thresholds where the destiny of the nation is determined” (2015, p. 384). Erdoğan, who defines women refusing motherhood so as to build a career as *yarım* (half) and *eksik* (lacking) justifies

his objection of gender equality adhering *fitrat* (nature) which is presented as biological tendencies of genders (Diken, 2016). His emphasis on *fitrat* is also strongly related to government's reinforcing of women's position as care-givers in the society. This reinforcement stems from the party's neo-liberal preferences as the state's responsibility of social care is transferred to family unit and therefor the women in the households. Despite the pro-employment initiatives, the requirement of providing childcare for the workplaces has been relaxed and women are encouraged to quit their jobs after marriage by their entitlement to a redundancy premium if they do so (Güneş-Ayata & Doğangün, 2017, p. 9). The party's discourse on family promotes patriarchal values and women's secondary position in society and reproduces the unequal gender dynamics in the households. This discourse is also in line with the party's neo-conservative agenda. Issues such as abortion, homosexuality and sexuality of youth are strongly rejected in an attempt to preserve the heteronormative patriarchal order (Acar, & Altunok, 2013, p. 20). The government's encouragement of the traditional extended families where three generations live together, is not only related to neo-liberal policy of social care but also its neo-conservative view. Kemalist modernization is blamed for the annihilation of the traditional family values as a result of the promotion of nuclear families. The elderly, living with the younger generations, in this respect, are expected to transmit the traditional moral values to them (Kocamaner, 2018, p. 37).

However, family's reframing as the viable care-system further disadvantages the already precarious citizens as revealed by Yazıcı's (2012) ethnographic study of urban lower class women and children. She demonstrates how the conflicts, subordination and violence in familial relations are overlooked by Family and Children Services as the women who requested help from state to establish a life independent of their kin were channeled to familial resources and if their children were young they were "encouraged to give their children up for adoption to 'good families' to be raised in 'better life situations'" (Yazıcı, 2012, p.123). What is neglected by the government is

that the discursive image of a protective extended family is not in line with everyone's experience of family in Turkey and therefore the state's refusal to take the responsibility of social care is damaging for some. One recent example of this neglect was Turkey's withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention by a presidential decision. The discussion about the withdrawal from the convention which was for preventing and combating against domestic violence was going for over a year. Originally signed in 2011 by Turkey, the convention was blamed for harming the family values and reinforcing homosexuality by the AKP officials on various occasions despite the efforts of the feminist organizations trying to explain the necessity and the true nature of the convention through campaigns on social media . The lack of a consensus on the public opinion (Uyan-Semerci & Erdoğan, 2021) was also not enough to prevent the withdrawal which was issued and announced on a Friday night. The decision was once again justified as the convention being against the traditional family values and was normalizing homosexuality.

The LGBTQ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer) community in Turkey has also been facing a great deal of difficulty over the rule of AKP government. In addition to frequent use of homophobic rhetoric by the government officials (Muedini, 2021) there also have been official enforcements such as the ongoing cancellation of the Pride March by the local government of Istanbul since 2016, justified by the security of the citizens and the public order. Various queer film festivals or screenings were also blocked by the local governments. The LGBTQ visibility on the media -albeit very limited even before- also decreased with the government censorship. In 2020, a Netflix original was cancelled in the pre-production stage as the government refused to grant a license to the production because of the inclusion of a gay character<sup>4</sup> (Yücel, 2020). More recently, an LGBTQ university club became the center of public discussion with

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<sup>4</sup> After Netflix's refusal of changing the script, it was announced in 2021 that the series originally named *If Only* will be made in Spain with Turkish screenwriter Ece Yörenç acting as a consultant (Ruiz de Elvira, 2021).

its dissolution. In the early days of 2021, a new rector was appointed to Boğaziçi University -one of the oldest and prestigious public universities of the country- by the president Recep Tayyip Erdoğan himself. The new rector shut down the LGBTQ club after the online uproar regarding a controversial art piece -submitted anonymously- in the student organized art exhibition held as a part of the ongoing student protests against the rector's appointment. Later on, four students of the club were arrested - which was followed by 160 more in the following days- by the police which was announced by the Minister of Interior, Suleyman Soylu in the form of a tweet referring to the students as the "LGBT perverts" (Logroño, 2021). The discussions and the enforcements regarding the LGBTQ students and the community in Turkey in general further escalated with this incident. The LGBTQ became to be referred as a "terrorist organization" by the government officials. These enforcements and discourses were all justified by the AKP officials as a mean to serve and protect the family values.

The studies about AKP's policies regarding family reveal that, women and non-heteronormative sexual orientations have been at the core of the current discourses of family. Their bodies and sexualities have been debated in an attempt to reproduce the neo-liberal, neo-conservative and patriarchal agenda of the current government in Turkey.

## **2.2. Discourse, Power and Family**

Despite being used frequently in various disciplines, discourse as a notion is hard to define. For the purpose of this theses, departing from Foucault's (2002) understanding of the term, what meant by discourse is a social system that systematically forms and constructs the objects of our knowledge. According to this definition, discourses produce and shape the reality as we know and nothing has any meaning outside of discourse. Yet discourses are not static formations lasting forever, on the contrary

they change constantly. They take shape and restructure according to time and place. In addition, there are competing discourses surrounding the same concepts or objects. This process of contention is where the connection between power and discourse becomes the most prevalent. There are dominant discourses and counter discourses. What determines whether the discourse is a dominant or a counter one is the power relations themselves (Miller, 1990). Despite giving conflicting definitions for discourse in different periods, Foucault himself states that discourses may function as to hide the actual characteristics of power thereby concealing the dominance (Fraser, 1989, p. 27). Therefore, in addition to what is said, in which situation it is said and how it is said, what is not said holds great importance for understanding the discourse.

The power referred in relation to discourse is usually the social power instead of individual (van Dijk, 1995) as it is widely accepted that discourses influence and shape the way the individuals communicate, not the other way around. Discourses have agency through its constructions of objects and concepts, not the individuals. However, the communication between the individuals is also useful for understanding and breaking down the dominant discourses as individuals reproduce discourses even if not producing them themselves. Thus discourses should not only be studied as autonomous verbal utterances but rather as type of communications depending on the social and cultural situations (van Dijk, 2008, p. 3). In this sense, the discourses in the social situations become as important as the discourses in public speeches. Thus there are many discourse studies about the micro-level social interactions such as the familial ones using interdisciplinary methods including but not limited to ethnography (Ayashiro, 2015; Tannen et al., 2007; Simpson, 1997).

Similar to discourse, giving an exact and general definition of 'family' has also been a compelling task. Defining 'family' in any cultural context other than Western is even more compelling as the existing literature on family is a reflection of the experience of

Anglo-American countries which standardizes the nuclear family consisting of a mother, a father and their children (Smith, 1993, as cited in Cheal, 2002, p.4 ). Zimmerman defines family as (as cited in Cheal, 2002):

(..) a group of people who assume responsibility for the functions including: physical maintenance and care of group members; addition of new members through procreation or adoption; socialization of children; social control over members; production, distribution, and consumption of goods and services; and maintenance of motivation and morale through love. (p. 7)

His definition is beneficial for understanding the functionality and social purpose of family and to create an unemotional ground for analyzing the power's nesting in the discourses related to family.

Foucault's conceptualization of power has been drawn on by many scholars to analyze the institution of the family (Taylor, 2012, p. 201) and therefore, is implemented for this thesis. While not dwelling on it that much, Foucault himself describes family as a patriarchal institution in which father alone wields power in *Psychiatric Power* (as cited in Taylor, 2012, p. 214). Also, in multiple occasions, he allocates familial power as a sovereign power instead of disciplinary. In his explanation of sovereign power he expresses that it was grounded either in blood-right or blood-conquest and there was always a "founding precedence" of it (Taylor, p. 203). His emphasis on blood can justify his allocation of familial power as being sovereign as his sample model of the family was the nuclear one and DNA is surely a defining and justifying factor for the power exercised in the family. Yet, the accounts where he addresses "the family as a disciplinary institution" indicates hesitation and therefore reveals the impossibility of assigning an exact model of power to the family as it is a discursive formation whose definitions and functions vary from time to time, place to place instead of an ever present entity (Taylor, 2012). Nevertheless, power and its nesting on familial relationships is important for understanding how the intra-familial relationships are constructed by the dominant discourses.

### **2.3. Power in In-Law Relationships**

The in-law relationships in Turkey, the MIL and DIL relationship in particular, constitute a peculiar power structure similar to that of a nuclear family despite the lack of blood ties or a shared history between the parties. This peculiar structure may be due to the in-laws' excessive involvement in the married couples' lives.

Although nuclear families are the prevalent type of family structures in terms of living arrangements in Turkey (Timur, 1972, as cited in Kağıtçıbaşı, 1982, p. 4; Kocamaner, 2018), the extended families are psychologically present for most people (Kandiyoti, 1974; Timur, 1972, as cited in Fişek, 1982, p. 297). Even if they are not living in the same houses, Turkish families maintain strong relationships with their relative families which means that extended families are more applicable to their cases than nuclear families are (Yakalı-Çamoğlu, 2017, p. 20). The extended family acts as a support system and a security blanket in the Turkish society and the members of the extended families are leading forces in the decision-making processes of the families (Yakalı-Çamoğlu, 2017; Fişek, 1982).

Examining Turkish families through Anglo-American theories is challenging as on the contrary of Anglo-American scholars' persistent emphasis on notions like blood tie and intimacy while describing 'family' (Davidoff, Doolittle, Fink, Holden, 1999), in Turkey, familial relations attained through marriage are as important as the descended ones (Yakalı-Çamoğlu, 2017). Relationships with the in-laws, in this context are as important as the birth parents. The paternal in-laws are usually more involved in the life of the nuclear family in traditional sectors and this may be related to the fact that more often than not, the paternal in-laws are in a more closer range to the nuclear family than the maternal ones. Also, it is seen as the son's responsibility to support his elderly parents when needed (Timur, 1972 as cited in Fişek, 1982, p. 298). As a result, the

relationship between MILs and DILs holds a peculiar position in Turkish culture in such a way that it is both mocked and glorified through its depictions in popular culture. Despite the lack of blood ties as a source of affinity, this type of relationship is advised to resemble a mother-daughter relationship. This recommended resemblance is not only in relation to obvious associations of a mother-daughter relationship like intimacy, but it also embraces -even highlights- other subtle associations like power and control. The popular culture's treatment of this relationship reflects the prejudices and stereotypes settled in the minds of people. The scholars draw attention to how these prejudices effect the relationship between the in-laws even before they became acquainted and how even the subjects of good in-law relationship examples define themselves as exceptional (Ekal, 2006; Yakalı-Çamoğlu, 2017).

The prejudices about the relationship between MILs and DILs owe a great deal to the Turkish proverbs about this relationship. These proverbs usually imply a conflicting nature regarding the relationship. The proverb, "The mother-in-law is a bogey, her son is a cutie"<sup>5</sup> means while the DILs love and respect their husbands, they despise their MILs who had raised their husbands to be that way. Another proverb is "Even if a mother-in-law is a cotton yard falling from the shelf she would crack the daughter-in-law's head open"<sup>6</sup> which means that no matter how the MIL is considerate and affectionate she would make the DIL anxious and nervous. Albeit fewer in contrast to negative ones, there are positive proverbs too. One example can be, "The daughter-in-law is created from the mother-in-law's soil."<sup>7</sup> This proverb refers to the similarities between the pair. The assumption is that a son will probably choose a wife who behaves similar to his own mother as he loves his mother and is accustomed to live with her and will want to marry a woman who will be in harmony with this accustomedness. Although this proverb seems like a one highlighting companionship at first glance, it

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<sup>5</sup> "Kaynana öcü, oğlu cici"

<sup>6</sup> "Kaynana pamuk ipliği olup raftan düşse, gelinin başını yarar"

<sup>7</sup> "Gelin kaynana toprağından yaratılmıştır"

gives the agency to the son instead of the women themselves. Ant the fact that the DIL is the one who is 'created' from the MIL's 'soil' manifests a certain hierarchy between them in which the MIL comes first.

Yakalı-Çamoğlu, in her 2017 study examining the nature of the relationship between MILs and DILs in the early republican period in Turkey, describes the relationship as a site of power, drawing insights from Foucault's conceptualization of power. Her study based on in-depth interviews with women who were recently wed in the mentioned period, reveals that counter to the thought of unconditional inclusivity of the family, acceptance to the family relies on social harmony (*denklik*<sup>8</sup>) in terms of themes like, body/beauty, social/economical capital and love. According to her, these themes are sources of power and conflict between the in-law women. Apart from the obvious exercises of power in the family such as decision making and division of labor in housework, she remarks that some attributions like being beautiful, coming from a wealthy and/or reputable families and being loved by the husband/son, act in fact, as sources of power in the family. Most of the women Yakalı-Çamoğlu (2019) interviewed were living with their MILs between the years 1923 and 1940, reflecting the prevalent living arrangement at that period. As women were yet to be part of the labor force in that early years of the republic, households were the sole sites that they can exercise power –even it was at a micro-level- in terms of managing the budget, taking care of the housework and childcare. Presence of an older woman, namely the MIL, in the household was disrupting the recently-wed woman's expectancy of managing the household by herself, therefore, causing a tension among the women in the household.

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<sup>8</sup> Aknerdem (2019) also mentions *denklik* in her ethnographic study of the marriage shows and how it is presented as an foundational block for a successful marriage.

However, many changes happened since that early republican period in terms of living arrangements of the families and women's participation in the labor force. Although a considerable amount of extended family households are still present, conjugal family households are more prevalent, especially in the urban life. However, as mentioned before, in a typical Turkish family, the presence of separate households does not reduce the necessity of a relationship between the in-laws. Family is perceived as something to expand or merge as a result of a marriage instead of formed and decided at birth. More recent ethnographic studies about the cultural factors effective on the relationships between MIL and DIL made similar emphasis on social harmony and power dynamic despite the fact that most of the women interviewed were living in nuclear family structures (Kaya, 2019; Ekal, 2006). Although the dominant discourse about this relationship parallels it to a mother-daughter one, the experiences of women demonstrate the impossibility of this. In multiple instances, the MILs interviewed stated that the good relationship they had with their DILs were by means of their abstain of meddling in the DILs' lifestyle (Kaya, 2019; Ekal, 2006). The meddling was usually defined as visiting their sons' house too frequently or giving advices -or even orders- to their DILs on how to perform domestic duties (childcare, cooking and cleaning) in the proper way. So when the power bestowed to the MILs by the patriarchal order was not exercised, even though the relationship was still not maternal, at least it was becoming more peaceful (Kaya, 2019; Ekal, 2006).

The relationship between MILs and DILs is of course not unique to the Turkish culture as obvious from the psychological and sociological research on the subject. While the Western scholars studying in-laws consistently pointed at the MILs as the most difficult in-laws (Duvall, 1954; Schillen, 1985, as cited in Marotz-Baden & Cowan, 1987, p. 386) the studies draw a picture not as dire as Turkey. Marotz-Baden and Cowan's (1987) study, for example, reveals that lack of communication and different values were common causes of conflict, similar to in Turkey, yet living in close proximity was

found not significant for increasing it. Fischer (1983), on the other, as a result of her interviews with 42 married men, suggests that marriage impeded intimacy between men and their mothers and if the men were to become fathers, their involvement with them further decreased. She concludes that the mediation of their wives because of the strain between the DILs and MILs, was affective on this distancing. In her study, contrary to the research on the Turkish context, Fischer (1983) positions DILs higher than MILs in terms of power dynamics. In her detailed analysis on the subject, Cotterill (1994) also drew a similar picture to Fischer's analysis. MILs, she states, afraid to be interpreted as "possessive" or "interfering" because of the overwhelmingly negative and stereotypical representations of MILs in the popular culture, had become insecure to establish an intimate relationship with their DILs and in relation to the prevalent conjugal structure of the family, DILs were in a relatively more powerful position than MILs as they were able to make choices about kin-keeping and excluding the MIL from their nuclear family including the MIL's son and grandchildren, if they wished so (Cotterill, 1994).

Asian experiences of the relationship between DILs and MILs are expected to share similarities with Turkey as a result of the patriarchal and patrilineal social order and similar traditional values. However, in her genealogy of this relationship in China based on the literary representations spanning 400 years, Yan Du (2013) observes a shift in power dynamics between the pair. Economically empowerment of the young DILs had reversed "the traditional power cycle of dominating MIL and obedient DIL" according to depictions of this relationship in literature (Yan Du, 2013).

The power between the women in the extended families also have a fluctuating dynamic instead of static as apparent from the existing research. Even though it is not explored in detail by scholars examining the contemporary dynamics of this

relationship in Turkey yet, the power hierarchy in it can vary and even the possibility of a companionship instead of rivalry is still there.

## **2.4. Intra-Familial Relations in Turkish Television**

### **2.4.1. In-Law Relationships in Turkish Television**

Intra-familial relations are essential subjects for television in Turkey as mentioned in the first chapter. The relationship between the in-laws in particular is a beloved and an age-proof subject. Usually stereotypical and humorous, examples of this relationship are depicted frequently in Turkish television. In addition to the reality shows and television series, television advertisements touch upon this relationship frequently. According to a recent study, a great majority of these advertisements highlight the conflict between the pair and with most using humor as a prominent tool (Akyol et al., 2019).

Interestingly, the first television series ever produced in Turkey was a sitcom called *Kaynanalar* (The Mothers-in-Law). *Kaynanalar* whose first season was premiered on TRT in 1974 has a broadcast history of 30 years and it is still considered as the longest running television series in the history of Turkish television (Kaptan & Algan, 2020). *Kaynanalar*'s focus, however, was not the conflicting relationship between the MIL and the DIL but rather the co-in-laws which has a specific name in Turkish language: *düniürler*. The *düniürler* in the series was portrayed to be from the opposite sides of the society as the wife's mother and father were from rural area whereas the husband's mother and father were from the urban area. As these two families were brought together by the happily marriage of their children, the sitcom followed the disputes between the in-laws, especially the two MILs.

The relationship between the MILs and the DILs specifically became a sitcom subject in later years. *Evimiz Olacak mı?* (Will We Have Our Own House?) started to be broadcast in 1999 on the private channel TGRT starring Seda Sayan who was a famous singer and actress at the time and now the current host of the in-law competition show, *Gelinim Mutfakta*. The series was about a DIL who had to live with her husband's both mothers: one is the biological mother and the other is the wet-nurse which is called the *süt anne* (milk-mother) in the Turkish culture. The lyrics of the opening song<sup>9</sup> which was also sang by Seda Sayan herself was indicating a rather problematic power dynamic between the three women:

The mothers-in-law are not even one but two!  
Will we have our own house?  
I will not come to heel, don't insist!  
Will we have our own house?  
Without a mother-in-law and grumble,  
Will we have our own house?  
We are disgraced before everyone!  
Will we have our own house?

I am the one who cooks  
(MIL) Girl, you are the one who sits back!  
I am the one who deals with the mother-in-law  
(MIL) You are the one who watches movies and series!  
I am the one who works day and night  
(MIL) You are the one who scorns the two of us!  
I am the one who is shoved around  
(MIL) You are the one who is free-riding too!

The lyrics were implying the stereotypical conflicts arising from the house chores and division of labor between the in-laws. Both parties were also seem to complain of being belittled implying a lack of social harmony. After her role as the victimized DIL, Seda Sayan, in addition to being the host of *Gelinim Mutfakta* became also the host of marriage shows and another in-law show which will be mentioned later.

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<sup>9</sup> For the Turkish lyrics see the Appendix A.

Another famous stereotypical MIL in the Turkish television was Granny Sürahi, who was a recurring character played by Yasemin Yalçın in the sketch series *İnce İnce Yasemince* (1995, KANALD).<sup>10</sup> Granny Sürahi was portrayed to be a bad-tempered MIL living with her DIL who she despises for not being worthy of her beloved son. The character was a caricature of the troublesome MIL who insults her DIL to the point of calling her by “*bu kadın*” (this woman) instead of her name or daughter. The DIL in the sketch was portrayed to be an uncomplaining, diligent mother of two who endures the insults of her MIL, Granny Sürahi and loves her despite of them. Although they were not the main focus, there were other memorable MIL characters in Turkish television series in the 2000s like Cevriye from the very popular family drama, *Yaprak Dökümü* (2004, KanalD) and İkbâl from *Aliye* (2004, ATV), a show about a woman in the pursuit of her child who was taken away from her by her cheating husband. In these shows the MILs were once again portrayed as troublesome characters whether it was for comedic purposes or as plot devices.

A more positive yet still stereotypical representation of the relationship as the focus subject came in 2008, with the situation comedy titled *Benim Annem Bir Melek* (My Mother is an Angel, ATV, Star TV). Neriman, the main character of the series was the caring mother of two adult sons, one of whom still lives with her and her husband while the youngest one lives with his wife next door. Neriman was portrayed as a MIL who loves her DIL yet criticizes her, usually regarding her domestic abilities. Albeit a more positive representation than the other ones mentioned, the conflicts arising between the MIL and the DIL in *Benim Annem Bir Melek* are also far from being authentic as even though the pair is not living in the same household, the proximity of their houses is portrayed to be the main cause of these conflicts.

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<sup>10</sup> The character appeared in other sketch shows produced by Yasemin Yalçın herself on different channels through years including *Yaseminname* (1994, ATV) and *Yasemince* (1996, StarTV, ShowTV, KanalD)

In addition to these representations on television series, the relationship was also explored in reality television since the early 2000s. Although shows like BBG and Pop Star which were direct adaptations of famous American formats Big Brother and American Idol reached great popularity in Turkish television, original local formats were tried too in the highly competitive primetime slot. One famous example as touched upon in the first chapter was *Gelinim Olur Musun?* (Perfect Bride, 2004, Show TV). This show was one of the many prime-time dating shows yet it became the most popular one amongst them. Its premise which was MILs choosing a suitable wife for their sons was used on several other formats and the format itself became the first television format that Turkey licensed and sold to other countries. One MIL in particular, Semra *Kaynana* became so famous for her temper and disapproval of the bride candidate her son fell in love with that she even had her own marriage show called *Semra Kaynana ile Dest-i İzdivaç* (Marriage with Mother-in-Law Semra, 2008, Flash TV) A similar format was tried in 2016 with the same host of *Gelinim Olur musun?*. *Gelinim Sensin* (FOX), airing on daytime but it was cancelled due to low ratings after only one month.

Another daytime format hosted by Seda Sayan started to be broadcast in the last days of 2013. The competition show called, *Kaynana Gelin Seda'ya Gelin* (Mother-in-Law and Daughter-in-Law Come to Seda, KanalD) was featuring three contestant groups consisting of a man together with his mother and wife. The men were asked controversial questions usually pitting the DILs against the MILs such as “Who is irreplaceable, your mother or your wife?” and the DILs and MILs were expected to guess the answers of their husbands/sons. The whole narrative of the competition was relying on the DILs and the MILs competing for the affection of husband/son while men were playing the piggy in the middle. The format was also short lived and it was cancelled after only five months as at that period the daytime schedule was dominated by the famous marriage show format.

After the cancellation of the marriage shows, the MIL and DIL shows started to dominate the daytime schedule. At one period in 2019, at least four private channels had one of these shows in their daytime schedule all of whom were cooking competitions. *Damat Bayıldı* (The Groom Loves It, Show TV, 2019) and *Anneler ve Gelinler* (Mothers and Brides, Star TV, 2019) were rather short lived shows of this format whereas *Gelinim Mutfakta* (Kanal D, 2018) which was the pioneer of them and *Zuhal Topal'la Sofrada* (FOX, 2018) are still on air with outstanding ratings.

#### **2.4.2. The Marriage Shows**

Marriage shows can be approached as the precursors of the MIL and DIL cooking competition shows which are the case studies of this thesis. The marriage show format was slightly different than dating shows as the ultimate goal of it was the marriage instead of dating. But the first dating show of Turkey, and an early sample for format can be said to be *Saklambaç* (Hide and Seek) which was an adaptation of the American gameshow *The Dating Game*. Airing in the early 1990s, *Saklambaç*'s format consist of a bachelorette or a bachelor questioning their three suitors who were hiding behind a curtain with the assistance of a female host. Although it was very popular, this direct adaptation offered a light entertainment which emphasized dating instead of marriage and abstained from serious topics like religion, economic status, etc.

The early versions of the marriage shows which were aired on primetime however became a phenomenon in the early 2000s, as a result of the global reality television craze. Usually consisting of two households which female and male participants separately resided in, these shows' main premise was marriage. The participants were getting to know each other through strictly scheduled and monitored daily meetings in the course of the show. There was a weakly elimination process where usually the SMS

votes were used to grant immunization from and in the end one popular couple were to be married with a big monetary prize such as a house.

As a result of these primetime marriage shows' success, daytime marriage shows, with a format similar to 1990s *Saklambaç* were introduced to Turkish television. What distinguished these daytime marriage shows -called *izdivaç programları* in Turkish- was the fact that they were not competitions but rather public matchmaking platforms. Their premise was that everybody who wanted to get married could succeed by finding a suitable -usually referred as *denk* (equivalent) in the Turkish context- partner. In the format flow, the participants introduced themselves and talked about their expectations from a potential partner and the audiences who were interested in a particular participant were encouraged to send SMS messages to show in order for them to arrange a brief phone conversation at first and later a face to face meeting on studio to happen on air. Aknerdem, in her ethnographic study of the marriage show, *Esra Erol'da Evlen Benimle* (Marry Me on the Esra Erol Show) states that these shows were in line with the AKP's family policies which aims to lessen the social security benefits of employment and rebuild family as an institution of caregiving by addressing women as the caregivers of children, the elderly and the disabled in the families (2019, p. 111). The marriage type endorsed by these marriage shows were in accord with the conservative, heteronormative values of AKP government (Aknerdem, 2019; Algan 2010; Nüfusçu & Yılmaz, 2012). Interestingly enough, these shows were heavily criticized by various circles of the public. Conservatives were concerned about the public display of courtship as they believed that marriage belonged to the private sphere and Turkish Directorate of Religion even condemned the format for "ruining the institution of marriage by reducing it to show" (Algan, 2010, p. 199). Feminist organizations, on the other hand, disapproved the way the traditional gender roles and patriarchal practices being represented and recreated through the discourse of the shows (Aknerdem, 2019; Kaya, 2013). Eventually, in 2017, "the government

cancelled the show by an emergence decree as a part of its family policy agenda and in line with the conservative outcry coming from Islamist NGOs” (Akınerdem, 2019, p.110).

Despite its notoriety, the marriage show format became one of the most, if not first discussed, local genre by Turkish television scholars. An overwhelming agreement was that in their depiction of marriage, these shows demonstrated how economic concerns took precedence over romantic ones as a motivation (Akınerdem, 2019; Algan, 2010; Kaya, 2013). In her early study of the marriage shows, Algan (2010) reveals how marriage was redefined as a “care-based” economic alliance instead of a system for building a family while underlining the fact that the “care” in question remains gendered. Women were expected to provide domestic care while financial care was perceived to be the responsibility of men (Algan, 2010, p. 210). Another outcome of these shows was the public debate stemming from the encounter of the public and the private spheres on television. Unlike dating shows that are produced in the U.S. or Europe, the marriage shows were not excessively edited and polished. The studio guests -most of whom were regular guests- were engaging with the participants by asking them questions, displaying their disapproval or giving advices. Usually there were near to ten participants per episode and they were rather diverse in terms of age, socio-economic status, appearance, etc. In addition, these shows were also recognized for the portrayal of “the unwanted face of Turkey struggling economically” (Algan, 2010, p. 199). Similar to the cultural hierarchy that diminished the Anglo-American reality television as a low form of entertainment, this unapologetic portrayal of socio-economically disadvantaged groups can also be said to be one of the underlying reasons that the marriage shows were overwhelmingly chastised by television critics. However, in academia, while general concerns remained still, they were appreciated for their role in generating public discussions and negotiations of socio-economical practices,

traditional gender roles, family regimes, modernity, religion, and ethnicity (Nüfusçu & Yılmaz, 2012; Özsoy, 2012).

Before their mandatory departure due to their cancellation by an emergency decree, these marriage shows were occupying a considerable space in Turkey's daytime schedule. Nearly every national network was allocating three hours of their daytime schedule to a marriage show so the vacancy created after their departure resulted in a serious format race. Although marriage shows were no longer in question the institution of marriage and familial relationships were still daytime schedule's themes of choice. In some cases, reality crime shows were re-introduced with a special focus on family disputes where participants were searching for lost family members or trying to reconcile with a loved one. This type of shows were helmed by ex-hosts of marriage shows. In addition, a series of competition shows dealing with subjects related to marriage and family began to be produced. Therefore, a new trend has arisen. The in-law cooking competition show was one of the most popular formats of this new trend.

Another interesting fact is that, with the exile of marriage shows, especially in the dominating competition formats, male presence in daytime screens became more scarce than ever before. The new formats were also in line with Turkey's contemporary gender climate and neoconservative reframing of family, meaning that, women's presence on these daytime competition shows was reduced to the context of domestic duties. Women were seen cooking for their MILs, cleaning houses, displaying their doweries and competing with each other to be the best in these domestic practices. The discourse of "strengthening the family" in an attempt to shift the responsibility of social care and protection from the state to the family unit (Yılmaz, 2015) can also be observed in this new daytime scene of Turkey. Similar to the dominant discourse, in these shows, women are praised and disparaged according to their domestic abilities (Sayan-Cengiz, 2020, p. 229-230). In her analysis of the competition show, *Gelin Evi*

(Bridal House) -where every week a group of five newly-wed women compete with each other to be the most “tasteful” in the matters of household design, wedding planning and traditional dowery- Sayan-Cengiz (2020) states that, the competition form while seemingly homogenizes women as “brides”, also isolate and alienate them by preventing alliances and companionship. In the discourse of these shows, distinctions are foregrounded instead of common experiences while marriage is presented as the only viable option and the ultimate goal for a women’s life journey (Sayan-Cengiz, 2020, p. 241-242).

## CHAPTER 3: REASEARCH AND ANALYSIS

### 3.1. Research Design

Two daytime television shows broadcast daily in the weekdays are the case studies of this thesis. Their episodes are the primary sources of this study. A sample consisting of six episodes for each show, a total of 12 episodes were analyzed in detail. My initial plan was to watch the sample episodes while they were broadcast on television. However, the analysis process of this thesis coincided with the Covid-19 outbreak unfortunately. As the format of one of the shows changed briefly to comply with the Covid-19 measures, I decided to split the sample into two parts as before Covid-19 and after it. In *Zuhal Topal'la Sofrada*, some format elements such as the interactions with other family members were abandoned because of the Covid-19 prevention measures and those elements were integral for the narrative of the show as far as I am concerned. Furthermore, the presence and later removal of Fatih Ürek as the original host of *Gelinim Mutfakta* was noteworthy in my opinion and therefore very integral to my analysis. So as my first part of the sample from 2020 coincided with his last episodes in the show, I decided to choose the other part of my sample from his earlier episodes instead of the new episodes featuring other presenters.

The first sample of 6 episodes were watched live as they were broadcast on television for the one week period. The Monday, Wednesday and Friday episodes of both shows were watched between the dates 2020, May 18-22. Since each episode lasted between two and three hours, approximately 15 hours of material was collected and analyzed in this first stage. The other 6 episodes were watched on the official YouTube channels of the show. These episodes were from dates between 2018, December 10-14.

Watching these episodes online gave me the chance to pause to take more detailed notes, resulting in a more different experience than watching live television. Besides that, watching the full episodes on the official YouTube channels introduced me to the short clips from the show which eventually became the secondary sources of this thesis. These clips are appearing in the official channels of the show so their editing, heading and even cover photos hold as important as the live broadcast of the show and they are integral to the format. As I was already a fan of these shows, my previous and later experience of watching the episodes -albeit without giving my complete attention like I did for the sample episodes- while they were airing on TV has surely affected my analysis.

When the power relations becomes the subject, notion of ‘discourse’ calls itself since these two terms are knitted to each other as explained in the previous chapter of this thesis. Analyzing reality TV texts from a discourse-analytical perspective, however, gives another meaning to this analysis. In their comprehensive book about studying reality TV from a discourse analytical perspective, Lorenzo-Dus and Garcés-Conejos propound that “different format types” -which they entitle as ‘genres’- “have different communicative purposes (...) realized by different sets of rhetorical strategies” despite sharing the goal of entertaining which constitute the discourse system of reality television (2013, p. 15). Furthermore, Critical Discourse Analysis aims “to unveil the workings of dominance and power within a range of institutional context” (Lorenzo-Dus & Garcés-Conejos, 2013, p. 27) and as a staple of institution of media, reality TV formats represents and constructs the reality itself. As explained by Lorenzo-Dus and Garcés-Conejos (2013):

(...) a key discursive practice regularly examined concerns the naturalization of certain identities, and the ideologies that underlie such naturalization practices. Naturalization refers to the fact that the way things are presented to us is not inevitable or unchangeable. (...) without denying the performed and pre-/post-broadcast editing of reality TV, analysis of identity in such shows from within Critical Discourse Analysis approaches works on the assumption

that the different genres of reality TV are influential in supporting and constructing particular identities and ideologies. (p. 28)

In this sense, during my analysis of the two MIL and DIL cooking competition shows, discursive practices through format elements including the host are given more weight than the individual power dynamics between the contestant pairs. The fact that they are reality TV shows which prioritize entertainment over accuracy was considered and how the power dynamics and common stereotypes regarding this idiosyncratic relationship is naturalized by format was analyzed accordingly. In order to differentiate between the individual dynamics and the format's discourse, the power dynamics in the shows were analyzed under separate headings consisting of; the format, the host and the contestants.

Despite both shows can be categorized as daytime cooking reality TV shows featuring MILs and DILs, their format elements differ from each other. So instead of analyzing them under the same headings, they were approached as different cases and analyzed accordingly. This gave me the opportunity of highlighting different elements in each of them.

### **3.2. *Gelinim Mutfakta* (My Daughter-in-Law is in the Kitchen)**

#### **3.2.1. Format Description and Analysis**

*Gelinim Mutfakta* (My Daughter-in-Law is in the Kitchen) started to be broadcast in 2018 with Fatih Ürek, a popular queer singer as a host in the daytime schedule of the national channel KanalD. It was the first long-running daytime competition show after the cancellation of channel's popular marriage show, *Kismetse Olur* which broke the rating records. The program is currently on its third season and third host as well.

The main premise of the show is a cooking competition where four teams consisting of MILs and DILs, compete in order to win the prize of five golden bracelets at the end of five days. The program's naming indicates the agency of the MILs whereas the DILs are positioned passively. Yet the format actually positions DILs as the contestants apparent from the tagline of the show, "The daughters-in-law are competing, the mothers-in-law are scoring (them)", therefore relying on the DILs' performance instead of the MILs.

### **3.2.1.1. The Format**

Similar to the morning show format, the daily flow of *Gelinim Mutfakta* starts with the MIL and DIL pairs dancing to the host's playback performance of the theme song. After the short introduction of the host, the dish of the day is introduced and the pairs are given 90 seconds with each other for discussing the dish which in the discourse of the show is defined as the period where MILs tell how to cook it and give tips to the DILs. All ingredients come in exact amounts necessary for the dish but the recipe is not given to the DILs. After the 90 second period ends, the DILs begin cooking while MILs go to another section of the studio to sit and wait together for the DILs to finish their dishes. The host shuttles back and forth between MILs and DILs through the preparation period and asks them hypothetical confrontational questions usually regarding family traditions. After the preparation period ends, the DILs leave the studio and the dishes they cooked are prepared for presentation by the program staff to be identical. The DILs take their positions in their own compartments and the host calls the MILs one by one for the blind tasting. The MIL who tasted the dish and done her open scoring goes to wait with her DIL in their countertop. When the blind tasting ends, all four pairs sit together with the host to discuss the events of the day and the answers they give to the hypothetical questions asked by the host. At the end of the day, the DIL with the highest score is awarded with a quarter gold coin.

The contestants can be said to be regulars as at the end of the week, the pair with the least points of that week are eliminated and the next week's broadcast starts with a new pair introduced. The show's narrative is similar to a reality television show as there are contestants who stayed on the show for more than one year or came back after elimination as a result of the popular demand. These popular contestants and their ongoing feuds and alliances with other contestants holds a prominent place in the narrative of the show. Along the flow of the show, there are small segments of interviews where contestants give comments about the situations afterwards resembling the confessional segments of reality television further approximating the format to a reality television show.

### 3.2.1.2. The Studio Design

The studio is designed as four kitchen like compartments containing their own worktops, fridges, and ovens. The compartments are positioned in the U shape to enable the contestants for interacting with each other while cooking.



**Figure 3.1** The main section of the studio designed as a kitchen

The DILs for the most part of the show are seen multi-tasking as in the short period they are given for cooking, they are also expected to interact with other DILs or the host about any subject other than cooking. During these interactions disputes and overly-exaggerated rituals of ridiculing are foregrounded instead of alliances and cooperation. Every DIL has the opportunity of personalizing her own compartment with the photographs of her family, flowers and gifts. Although the MIL and DIL pairs together compete as a team, the compartments are seen as the personal spaces of the DILs.



**Figure 3.2.** The second section of the studio designed as a living room.

MILs on the other hand, are associated with the other section of the studio which is designed as a living room. The MILs who spend most of their time in the show in this living room can also add some decorative elements such as gifts, photographs or items related to the inside jokes. The format positions kitchen as the DILs' space whereas the living room as the MILs' space which undoubtedly points to the power hierarchy in the extended households. On the other hand, the design of the studio as resembling to rooms of a house should be considered in the context of associating women with private spheres such aka domestic spaces such as houses. This second studio resembling a living room has a viewing window and a monitor for MILs to watch DILs while they cook. This window together with the monitor is not that essential for the cooking

competition part of the show because of the blind tasting format and a curtain is closed after a short period of time in order not to give MILs any indicators for choosing their own DILs in the blind tasting and giving them the highest score. So this surveillance window can also be said to serve the purpose of positioning MILs higher in the power hierarchy in the show's format. Similar to Foucault's (2009) analogy of panopticon, the right to observe acts as a control mechanism granted to the MILs while the DILs internalize this constant surveillance as they don't see the MILs, their observes but only know that they can be observed in any time.

### **3.2.1.3. The Video Screenings**

The surveillance however, is not reserved for the MILs only. In the power hierarchy of the program the host has the highest position and MILs are observed too. Despite the fact that the format is branded as a cooking competition, it relies heavily on the screenings of the conflict-creating videos where the contestants are shown talking about each other, indicating a more hybrid confrontational reality genre. Although they are prominent for the period between the blind tasting and the announcement of the winners where they are used for setting a topic, these screenings does not have a specific schedule in the flow as sometimes they are screened to DILs while cooking or MILs, in the living room. These confrontational videos are usually about the disputes regarding the different opinions on how a MIL or a DIL should behave. In addition to expectations from these women due to traditional values, other MILs and DILs and more often than not the host also voice certain expectations about how they should behave because of their position as a MIL or a DIL in certain situations. Even though the sons/husbands are absent from the format, their presence is felt through the occasional selfie-videos, flowers and gifts they send to their mothers and wives. Videos sent to the show and screened in the broadcast are not limited to the son's/husband's

but also other women in the family including the mothers of the DILs or the daughters of the MILs send videos to voice opinions about certain disputes.

#### **3.2.1.4. The Prize System**

The show's prize system also refers to the traditional gifts that are presented to the brides during the marriage ceremony. At the end of the each day a quarter gold coin is awarded which is a traditional gift given at the marriage ceremonies to the newly-wed couple by their family and friends. These golden coins are given by pinning to the dresses of the bride and the groom and in a similar fashion, in the format, the golden coins that are awarded to the DILs are given to the MILs in order for them to pin the coins to the collar of the DILs' clothes. The weekly big prize of five golden bracelets also resembles a traditional wedding gift usually given to the bride by the paternal side of the family. These golden bracelets are kept in a wooden box, similar to a miniature dower-chest, and just like the golden coins, are given to the MIL by the host for them to put the bracelets on the wrist of their DILs ceremoniously.

#### **3.2.1.5. The Theme Song**

The theme song of the show was sang by the Fatih Ürek in the first two seasons. After his abrupt departure from the show, the song was played as an instrumental piece for a while because his first replacement Onur Büyüktopçu was not a singer. Onur Büyüktopçu was later replaced with Seda Sayan, a famous singer/host and her version started to be played in the opening. The song lyrics below<sup>11</sup> once again indicate the agency of the MILs as it is sang from the point of the DIL:

My daughter-in-law is in the kitchen  
Her dish is on the plate  
The flavor of it lingers

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<sup>11</sup> For the Turkish lyrics, see the Appendix B.

My daughter-in-law is in the kitchen  
She is the best in acquiring the right taste  
Setting and equipping the table  
And presenting it like a work of art  
My daughter-in-law is in the kitchen.

The MIL in the song clearly praises her DILs domestic abilities, indicating a team play. In addition to her cooking skills, her presentation skills are also praised by the MIL even though in the format the presentation is done by the professionals to be dull and identical to prevent MILs from identifying their DILs dishes from the presentation. These lyrics, in this sense, only serve the purpose of praising the domestic abilities of the DILs in general.

### **3.2.2. Position of the Host**

Over the course of the three years, *Gelinim Mutfakta* was hosted by three different presenters. It was initially hosted by Fatih Ürek, a famous queer singer who made contradictory statements regarding his sexuality from time to time. Fatih Ürek who also sang the opening song has hosted the show for two seasons consisting of 530 total episodes and he truly became identified with the show. As the sample consisting of 12 episodes which were further analyzed was from the first two seasons, the presenter referred in this section is Fatih Ürek if not indicated otherwise.

After the conclusion of the second season, Fatih Ürek was replaced as the host of the show. The third season began with the presentation of Onur Büyüktopçu, who reached celebrity status and gained prominence as a presenter after his supporting role in the television series, *Kiralık Aşk*. Onur was playing a mean gay character<sup>12</sup> named Koray

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<sup>12</sup> In the interview that is mentioned, Onur Büyüktopçu says that he believes Koray to be asexual instead of gay as he distances himself from women and men both. But this distancing can't be considered independent of the current censorship of homosexual characters in Turkish television. It is nearly impossible for a television series in Turkey to depict a homosexual

in the series which resulted in many people believing him to be gay in real life. As this was his one prominent role, his image became inseparable from Koray and although he himself stated that he was not gay (Gence, 2016), this image surely was impactful for choosing him as Fatih Ürek's replacement. As the show was constructed as a feminine space, the inclusion of a masculine figure would distort the established order of the format. Yet Onur Büyüktopçu's presenter persona was not feminine as Koray which may be the reason for the showrunners' replacing him with Seda Sayan eventually, in the beginning of the 2021.

### 3.2.2.1. Fatih Ürek and His Host Persona



**Figure 3.3.** Fatih Ürek in the intro of the show

Fatih Ürek was an inseparable element of the format with his queerness that initially gave the show a camp aesthetic<sup>13</sup>. With his colorfully patterned suits, exaggerated use

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relationship and even the digital platforms are subject to this censorship as revealed by the more recent Netflix ban that was mentioned in the second chapter.

<sup>13</sup> Although there are many different opinions on what camp really means, Susan Sontag's (2018) famous definition of the term which lists artifice, exaggeration, theatricalization and irony as key elements for it is meant here.

of slang, theatrical reactions and his host persona which embodied the ‘gossipy neighborhood aunty’<sup>14</sup>, he was the face of *Gelinim Mutfakta*.

Fatih Ürek’s music career dates back to late 1980s where he had worked as a performer for various night clubs in İstanbul and Bodrum (Mekannın Sahibine Geldik, 2021). The night clubs were leading forces for the music business in Turkey back then and many other lead singers performing there were also having a great coverage on television screens. Since the public broadcaster TRT was still monopolizing the television screens, this coverage which was necessary for granting celebrity status for the singers was reserved for the trained Turkish classical music singers whereas the popular music genres such as Arabesque and singers who perform such music were denied it. Fatih Ürek’s stage performance was praised for being entertaining yet his stage persona with his colorful costumes -inspired by Zeki Müren<sup>15</sup>- was outside of the heteronormative standards set by TRT. So early 1990s can be said when he reached his celebrity status thanks to the emergence of the private channels that provided space for the singers who were previously neglected by TRT. His introduction to television screen was as a section host for the entertainment show *Eğlence Sırılsıklam* (1993, InterStar) In these first years of privately owned channels, television screens in Turkey transformed into liberal cultural spheres where diverse gender, ethnic and religious identities had a chance of existing together.

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<sup>14</sup> *Dedikoducu mahalle teyzesi* is a common stereotype of the elderly women who acts like moral compasses of the neighbourhood while carrying information about very private matters. They are stereotyped as blabbermouthed women who particularly loves to judge young women according to the patriarchal norms.

<sup>15</sup> In the same YouTube interview he states that his costumes was inspired by Zeki Müren, a famous cross-dressing singer of the 1960s who enjoyed great TRT coverage in that period thanks to his classical Turkish music training and his lack of disclosure about his sexual identity. For further reading on the subject, see Hawkins (2016).

Fatih Ürek's stage persona was established in this liberalized social atmosphere where gay singer/showmen were admired and preferred for their entertainment quality. Yet even in this period, they were avoiding sharing their private lives and talking about their sexual identities. Similar to Zeki Müren's experience of thirty years prior, the admiration for gay singers was reserved for their stage personalities only. In the early 2000s, with the neo-conservative party AKP's coming to power by having the vast majority of the votes, the queer visibility in television screens started to decrease and recently, with the party's continuous rulership, it came to the point of disappearing altogether<sup>16</sup>. Fatih Ürek's everchanging statements about his sexual identity and his persona is a perfect example of a queer character's rather challenging effort to survive in an increasingly conservative gender climate.

In one of the his interviews<sup>17</sup> from 2000s, two years prior to AKP's victory in general elections, he says the following about his sexual identity (Kelebek, 2000):

As a matter of fact, our people are very tolerant. They respect all kinds of art and artists. If a person is homosexual or bisexual there is no need for them to point it out. They love me because I don't do that. I have people that love me not only in the big cities but also in Anatolia too. A lot of transsexual, transvestite asocial people made themselves stand out too much. Now it is out of control. I am also against that. (..) I don't want to fight the society. My life with my lover should stay indoors. I've overcome such things as walking hand to hand. I won't fight for homosexual rights. I thought about it and figured it out. There is no need for such things. I am extremely satisfied with living in Turkey. I feel comfortable and free. Why should I feel uncomfortable as long as I don't 'decode' myself or become degenerate? One thing is always overlooked. There was a Zeki Müren reality in this country. The society accepted him without any scrutiny.

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<sup>16</sup> The cancellation of the Netflix original *If Only*, by RTÜK is the most explicit indicator for the conscious erasure of non-heterosexual characters from television screens. Although before that the situation was still that the non-heterosexual characters and their sexuality were not allowed to be explored overtly (Akınerdem, 2020, p. 186), there were still some representations then and there.

<sup>17</sup> For the original quote in Turkish, see the Appendix G.

His distancing himself from the transsexual people, refusal to fight for gay rights and emphasis on living his life indoors, away from the public eyes imply to a bargaining with the heteronormative and conservative society of Turkey in order to stand still in the entertainment world. In this interview, although he doesn't frame it as a 'confession' he admits to being homosexual while emphasizing his abstaining from practicing his sexuality in order to have the tolerance granted to Zeki Müren who followed a similar path in his career journey. In countries like Turkey where there is a stigma against non-heteronormative sexual identities, it is very common for people to hide their sexual identities in order not to encounter negative attitudes (Eslen-Ziya & Koc, 2016, p. 807). Fatih Ürek's ambiguity on his sexuality, therefore, is strongly related to this desire to escape a backlash because of it. In the same interview, Fatih Ürek also states that although he wanted to have a family with kids, it was not possible at the time as the society wanted to see him alone. This abstain from practicing homosexuality, however, was not enough for him to be accepted by society without scrutiny like Zeki Müren who he obviously takes as an example. Nine years after this interview, he stated that he was not allowed to be on the public broadcaster TRT's screen, still (OdaTV, 2009).

At the time of this complaint, his screen persona was already getting further away from his gay singer image established in the 1990s. In recent years, he defined his sexuality as asexual in many instances yet did not refrain from expressing his opinions about how 'his woman' should be (Haber Türk, 2016). These opinions were bearing a striking resemblance to biopolitical discourse of the AKP government, especially on the female body. In a 2014 interview where he boasted of his own prayer room, he also remarked on the importance of virginity of the girls and how he objects the girls' liberation nowadays (Vatan, 2014). In 2016, he went as far as to say that he would have beat his wife if he was married (Sözcü, 2016). These comments can be read as his attempt to reconstruct his gender identity to be closer to the hegemonic masculinity which he perceived to be more acceptable in the Turkish society. In order to perform this

acceptable and ideal type of masculinity, he was implying and even exercising a hegemony over the 'feminine'. This new neo-conservative identity as opposition to his previous rather apologetic queer one, eventually formed the basis of his neighborhood aunty persona he performed in the show *Gelinim Mutfakta*. Although he was still Fatih Ürek with his colorful costumes and make-up, everything was more moderate. He was seen wearing flamboyant suits with a more reduced make-up on the show while advocating for the patriarchal norms when giving his opinions about the family matters. This ambiguous performance ensured a hegemonic position over the female contestants in the show as analyzed in the previous part without violating the feminine space of the show for the two seasons he presented.

Yet even this new neo-conservative masculine identity was not tolerated and he eventually was fired from the position in the September of 2020, just two weeks before the beginning of the third season by a phone call. As he stated later on, the president of the broadcast channel Kanal D had called him himself and said that his replacement was required by 'Ankara', meaning that there was a state intervention that insisted his replacement (Söylemezsem Olmaz, 2021). The gender climate in Turkey was getting more and more intolerant at that point with increasing hateful remarks about non-heteronormative sexual and gender identities of the government officials which lead to the eventual withdrawal from the İstanbul Convention six months later, in March 2021, as explained in the first chapter.

The current host of the show, Seda Sayan was a close friend of Fatih Ürek himself and a pioneer of the morning show host persona, so her presence as a host was more complimentary of the show than Onur Büyüktopçu's. Her affiliation with the contestants and the viewers is more similar to Fatih Ürek as she establishes a kin-like relationship with them. Similar to Fatih Ürek's positioning himself as an older brother,

Seda Sayan<sup>18</sup> positions herself as an older sister vis-à-vis the DILs and a younger sister vis-à-vis the MILs whereas the DILs addresses her as Seda *Abla* (older sister). This kin-like relationship and overtly-feminine performance of Seda Sayan consolidates the feminine atmosphere of the show while eventually erasing the camp aesthetics which was integrated with Fatih Ürek.

### **3.2.2.2. Power Relations Between the Host and the Contestants**

When the relationship between the host and the contestants are considered, the show resembles the morning show format where a certain hierarchy between the host and the audience members is present yet the communication between them seems casual and even kin-like. The host addresses both the contestants and the viewers at home in a very casual way and uses slang alluding familial affinity while doing so frequently. Before the emergence of private channels, television in Turkey was monopolized by the public broadcaster TRT as stated in the first chapter. During this TRT monopoly, the presenters were speaking in a very formal way with their perfect articulation and strictly selective choice of words. They were also using formal speech with the audiences while they were addressing them or engage with them. This type of speech came to be referred as İstanbul Turkish or the TRT Turkish later on. In contrast to the TRT Turkish, the morning shows the morning show hosts were defined by the intimate and candid communication they formed with the audiences. The use of slang terms such as '*kız*' (girl) as a form of address was part of this intimate communication. The host uses the term '*kız*' at the beginning of the sentences as a form of address various times in *Gelinim Mutfakta*, approximating the communication between him and the

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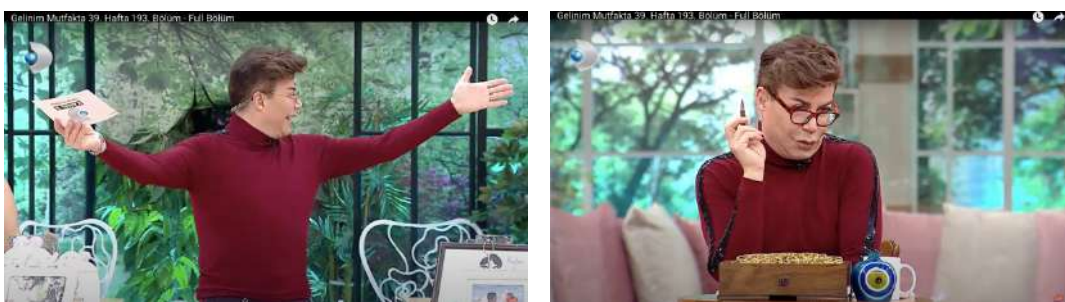
<sup>18</sup>Although Seda Sayan herself is an advocate of patriarchal family values, her headstrong character and unapologetic manners are celebrated by feminists from time to time resulting in an ambivalence about her intentions. For a more detailed study about her celebrity status that dates back to three decades, see Acar (2020) and Burul & Eslen-Ziya (2018).

contestants to that of a morning show host and the audiences. In addition to the frequent use of 'kız', he also uses other slangs such as 'anam' (my mama) and 'bacım' (my sister). The use of slang or rather the choice of slang also serves to code the space of the show as a feminine and even a familial space as obvious from the allusions of kinship. While using these slangs the host positions himself similar to a family member or a family friend.

The slang also reminds the casual conversations that is assumed to happen in *altın günü* (gold day) or at *hamam* (bathhouses) in popular culture. The *altın günü* can be explained as a monthly social gathering of women with the purpose of "rotating savings and credit associations" where each guest contribute a certain amount of money -or gold coins traditionally- and the total amount is given to the host (Ekal, 2006, p. 3). These gatherings, together with the women's public baths are the most referred occasions when the conversations among a group of women is in question. These conversations are called *altın günü* or *hamam* conversation in popular culture and depicted as to include the frequent use of the previously mentioned slangs, *kız*, *anam* and *bacım*. The 'feminine' atmosphere in *Gelinim Mutfakta* has incontestable resemblances with *altın günü*. From the daily prizes of gold coins to home-like studio design, many aspects of the show are reminiscent of the gold days which can be considered as an attempt to code the space of the show as feminine. In this way, the choice of a gay host also becomes more justified as the overtly masculine presence of a heterosexual male host would distort this order.

The host's frequency of using slang in conversation with the contestants is higher when the contestant in question is a DIL indicating a more defined power relation between the DILs and the host. In addition to use of slang, the host addresses the contestant DILs by only their first name whereas he addresses the MILs as "*Hanım*" which stands for 'Ms.'. All contestants address the host as "*Bey*" in return. In the Turkish language,

the plural form of you is used as a mean of respect and all contestants use this plural you while conversing with the host whereas the host only uses the plural you in his conversations with the MILs and there are many instances where he neglects to use it with MILs too. These forms of address and the usage of the plural you indicate a three-tiered hierarchy where the host is positioned as the highest and the DILs as the lowest. The presence or lack of these formal addresses also results in further ambiguity regarding the nature of communication between the host and the contestants. Whereas the intimacy is a defining element for the morning show hosts, in *Gelinim Mutfakta*, the ambiguity itself becomes a defining element.



**Figure 3.4.** Fatih Ürek during the beginning (on the left) and the discussion section (on the right) of the episode dated 12 December 2018

The host is positioned as both a moderator and an entertainer in the show. He opens the show with singing and clapping, addresses the viewers at home joyfully and engage in small talk with the contestants approximating him to an entertainer. In the later parts however, we see him wearing eyeglasses on the tip of his nose behind a rostrum asking questions to the MILs and the DILs with a serious look on his face. In addition to the abrupt shifts between formal and informal speech, the persona of the host changes too. Sometimes he positions himself as similar to an elderly family member and other times as a respected show host. The common point of his two personas is that he is always higher than the contestants in the power hierarchy.

This power hierarchy manifests itself through his interactions with the contestants. One example to these interactions can be said to occur in the episode dated 12 December 2018, over a dialogue between him and one of the contestants Ziyafet. Ziyafet, together with her DIL Elif (1) is one of the long standing contestants of the competition and is famous for her rather conservative and traditional perspective on how a MIL and DIL relationship must be like. This perspective accompanied by her rather distinctive local accent marks her as a traditionally compelling MIL in the eyes of both the host and the other contestants. Her traditionality usually contrasts with other contestants' modern take on the relationship and criticized and even mocked frequently by the host. In this episode, the host calls Ziyafet for tasting and scoring. Although he calls her by adding *hanım* to her name, throughout their conversation he uses informal speech with the singular you. Ziyafet, who remarked that she hadn't tasted the dish of the day - which is a Mexican pastry- before, at the beginning of the episode comes to the tasting table and the following dialog happens<sup>19</sup>:

**Fatih:** Now look, you said (*imitating Ziyafet's local accent*) 'I don't know' before. Take a look at what is it like now. (*pointing at one of the plates*) See how delicious it is. Taste and see yourself. (*pointing his index finger at Ziyafet's DIL, Elif 1*) From now on, Elif (1) will make it for you all the time.

**Ziyafet:** (*skeptically*) I've never seen her make it.

**Fatih:** Girl, how could she- She learned how to just here!

(...)

**Ziyafet:** (*reproachfully*) She could've invite me to her house and cook something else then.

**Fatih:** (*to Elif 1 with one hand on his hips*) Why don't you invite this woman?

**Ziyafet:** (*continues*) She could have made dumplings or patty-

**Fatih:** (*turning his face to other contestants*) Always- There is nothing else- Always the dumplings and the patties. (*hits his hand on the table as if putting a period at the end of the sentence*)

**Ziyafet:** We are eating that kind of food, what else will we eat?

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<sup>19</sup> For the Turkish dialogue, see the Appendix D.

**Fatih:** What about *su böreği*<sup>20</sup>? Do you ‘make’ it, girl? Honestly, if I wasn’t feeling too lazy I would ‘make’ it myself.

Although both sides happen to speak informally, his hegemony is clear. Firstly, he uses the imperative with both the MIL and the DIL, indicating a hegemony granted to him by being the host of the show which in his case also means having the final say. Secondly, his imitation of her local accent and later objection to her taste that favors traditional foods like dumplings indicates a cultural hegemony based on the distinction between the urban and the provincial. Although there are other contestants from Anatolian cities, Ziyafet’s provinciality is the most obvious as she often acknowledges and embraces it with her perspective, arguments and her distinctive local accent. The host’s choice of informal speech and a more frequent use of slang with Ziyafet is presented as his attempt to adapt to her communication style. A little later in the same episode, Ziyafet describes one of the DIL’s dish as insipid, using *yavan*, a word of old Turkish origin. The host turns his face to other contestants and explains that she meant that it was tasteless as if to interpret her description. This attempt reveals his assumption of that there is a lack of understanding between Ziyafet and the other contestants. It also reveals that the host positions himself as a moderator who facilitate the communication among the contestants as he is capable of understanding both the urban and the provincial.

This capable position becomes also obvious from his declaration about *su böreği*. It is a difficult pastry that is believed to require mastery, he states that he can make it if he was ‘not too lazy’. His not making it has nothing to do with his capability but rather his lack of interest or patience therefor. In this instance, his capability of making a pastry this difficult can be seen as highlighting his interest in cooking to justify his

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<sup>20</sup> *Su böreği* is a traditional pastry with many thin layers of dough, usually known for being difficult to make. The term *açmak* which can be explained as preparing these thin layers of dough here is translated as ‘to make’. Preparing these doughs is the hardest part of this pastry so the term *açmak* is used for making the whole pastry.

position a cooking show host, his choice of dish indicates to another story. Traditionally, the women in the family -usually the eldest and the most experienced ones- make *su böreği* in the religious holidays or family gatherings and they are praised for their *su böreği*. His statement of being capable of making it may serve to affiliate himself with the female contestants and the viewers at home to create identification with them yet his indication of being too lazy to make it breaks this identification and rather consolidates his hegemony through his privilege of refusing the laboriousness of the task.

Similar to his attempt of interpreting Ziyafet's description of the dish, the host tries to mediate the conflicts between the MILs and DILs at the discussion section of the show, by interpreting their comments. Although he is the one asking the questions that initially creates conflict between the MIL and DIL pairs, he intervenes to give explanations for the true intentions of both sides when the discussions draw on. One example to this mediation occurs after a chain of events that begins when during a game of "Who is the most (...)?" one of the MILs, Çiğdem is referred as the most stingy one between the two by her DIL, Elif (2). Çiğdem and Elif (2) are another pair who stayed in the competition for a very long time and Elif (2) even became the DIL with the most golden bracelets at one point of the competition. Although they bicker as a result of format's setting them at odds from time to time, they are usually seen at harmony with each other. In one of these attempts of setting the pair at odds, the question of who is the most stingy one amongst them is posed to the pair to which both of them point to one another. Çiğdem, however takes offence of Elif's (2) response -despite she herself picked Elif (2) as the most stingy one among the two- and retorts by listing all of her expenses for Elif's (2) wedding. This squabble is eventually blown out of proportion by both the other contestants and the host, with the help of video screenings and confessionals, creating a conflict between the MIL and DIL pair. The host who initially announces the discussion dedicated to this conflict by saying "The long-awaited

‘confrontation’ is coming soon! Is it fair that Çiğdem Hanım is ‘accused’ of being stingy?’ is seen trying to settle the dispute in the following dialog<sup>21</sup>:

**Elif (2):** My mother is not here and my MIL never calls and asks if we (she and her husband) need something or want something. You are paying for my wedding but you are not just doing it for me. You are doing it for your own reputation.

**Fatih:** You’re saying that ‘You didn’t do much for me individually’ my dear Elif<sup>22</sup>, right?

**Çiğdem:** I am already asking that to my son unbeknownst to my daughter-in-law.

**Fatih:** What she’s saying is ‘Why don’t I know?’

This interaction is a concise example of the host’s attempts of interpreting the conversations between the MILs and the DILs which happens frequently. When this attempt is reckoned as a gracious endeavor to settle the conflict between these family members, his provocative announcement of the same conflict becomes contradictory. As a matter of fact, Elif’s (2) statement of Çiğdem being stingy is uttered as part of a game that puts her in the position of choosing either herself or her MIL as the stingy one, so rephrasing this utterance as ‘accusing’ Çiğdem of being stingy is far away from being reconciliatory. Hence, the attempt of interpretation can be said to stem from the host’s assumption of either understanding the DIL’s intention better than her MIL did or that he is expressing the DIL’s intention better than herself. Either way this assumption imply to a position of power as he, acting as a moderator, implicates that he is more insightful than the women in question on a subject regarding the dispute between them.

When the format in general is considered, the host is positioned as an authority on the relationship between the MILs and the DILs. He gives advices to both regarding how they should behave towards each other. These advices are presented as de facto rules

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<sup>21</sup> For the Turkish dialogue happened in episode dated 18 May 2020, see the Appendix E.

<sup>22</sup> Here the host addresses Elif (2) as *Elif’ciğim*. *-ciğim* is a diminutive suffix which is used for showing affection in this context.

or norms instead of personal opinions. In the episode dated 20 May 2020, for instance, he reproaches the DILs for not buying any presents for their DILs on Mother's Day despite their excuse of not being able to buy something because of the Covid-19 lockdown. "No matter what you could have ordered somehow" he remarks and adds later on, "Daughters-in-law, this kind of things are important. Especially for the relationship between the daughter-in-law and the mother-in-law. Don't skip such special days." Fatih Ürek himself has never been married, so his remarks on what is important for this relationship does not come from his personal experience but it is rather a reflection of the discourse that approximates the MIL-DIL relationship to a mother-daughter one. More often than not, his advices and comments reflect the dominant discourse about family and they are presented as the public opinion itself. There is also a kin-like relationship established with the contestants similar to an elder family member. In some occasions, he justifies his advices to the DILs by referring himself as an older brother. This kin-like relationship together with the previously mentioned use of slang alluding familial affinity, serve to imitate a family environment within the show to construct it as private sphere. The relationship established with the viewers at home is also part of this construction.

### **3.2.2.3. Power Relations Between the Host and Viewers at Home**

Similar to the relationship with the contestants, the relationship the host established with the viewers at home carry many elements from the previously mentioned morning show format. A certain hierarchy is prevalent despite of the ostensible intimacy. This hierarchy is evident from the didactic attitude towards the viewers. Through his limited interactions with the viewers over the flow of the show, the host is usually seen making recommendations.

Before the MILs are called for the blind-tasting, the host tastes all four dishes by himself and makes comments about them. As all contestants are absent for this part of the show, he interacts with the viewers. Although there are instances where he refers them as ‘girls’, he usually refers to the viewers as ‘*hanımlar*’ (ladies) in relation to the common and outdated assumption of the daytime television viewer’s gender. He talks about the food and gives tips about the recipe such as, “if you use dates instead of sugar this will become a healthy dessert”.

Apart from the assumption of the viewer’s gender, there is also an assumption of the viewer’s experience in cooking. In addition to tips about the recipe of the day, the host also gives general information about cooking. When the dish of the day which happens to be a dessert contains sumac, for example, he feels the need to explain: “Sometimes there may be spice in desserts too. I also like cinnamon in some dishes. Eggplant, for example. Definitely add some cinnamon to eggplant dishes, please.” As the focus of the show is far away from being cooking, this type of recommendations stand out. Neither the studio nor the flow resembles to a traditional cooking show format where they give instructions with a relaxing background music. Furthermore, the host in question has no training in cooking and his tasting of the dishes does not serve much in the format as he doesn’t score them. So the product advertisements before the commercial breaks are the only parts where his authoritative position relating cooking is utilized. During these advertisement sections, the host himself introduces and praises the products to the viewers once again addressing them as ‘ladies’. The intimate yet authoritative relationship he established with the viewers thanks to these limited interactions, therefore, allows the sponsored products to be presented under the guise of a reliable friend's recommendation.

The didactic attitude of the host is not reserved for the instances where he gives cooking recommendations however. His retort to Ziyafet in the episode dated 10 December

2018 about giving the wrong message reveals his mission of setting an example for the viewers. During a discussion between the MILs and DILs -which was once again generated by a hypothetical question posed to them by the host- about who should have the money and gifts collected at the wedding, Ziyafet remarks that as the parents are the ones who pay for the wedding, they should have the money collected at the wedding too. The host from his rostrum strongly objects<sup>23</sup>:

**Fatih:** Hold on a minute. You marry these children like- We raised them- They should work for us.

**Ziyafet:** Of course-

**Fatih:** (*Pointing his index finger up*) Look, we are making a television program here.

**Ziyafet:** Okay, you are making- I'm telling the truth.

**Fatih:** This is a wrong message to give. Children are born. They grow up. This is the duty of the parents. Then, 'that children will work for us, will take care of us- They will give us what they earned or they will give us their wedding gifts (golds)' These are all very wrong.

As Ziyafet was not addressing the viewers while making these comments, the host's use of the term message while indicating the fact that this was a television show imply what he perceives the show to be. Despite being an entertainment show, he assumes that these representations of the familial relations affect the public perception about these relations. So conveying the right message, meaning, representing this relationship to set an example is important to him apparent from his objection. However, how this example is constructed is a whole other subject and will be discussed later on. In a way the host himself acknowledges the fact that this show is reproducing the discourse on family as much as the show itself is produced by this discourse. How his mission of setting an example for the public is not only limited to his persona on the show but rather strongly related to the identity he constructed to remain visible in the current heteronormative gender climate of Turkish television constitutes the subject of the following section.

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<sup>23</sup> For the Turkish dialogue, see the Appendix C.

### 3.2.3. Power Relations Between the MILs and DILs

It is a fair assumption that the MIL and DIL pairs in the show are at least in good terms with each other considering the fact that they did volunteer to appear in the show together as a team. The format also positions these pairs in tandem with each other instead of against each other. Yet the disagreements between the pair are highlighted by the format instead of cooperation because conflict is a prominent narrative element for the genre of reality television.

When the official YouTube channel of the show is examined, this narrative depending on the conflict becomes more evident. In this channel, there are 12 video playlists including, trailers, full episodes and sections of the show such as ‘Winner of the Day’ and ‘Critical Questions’. Among these playlists, the one containing the most videos with over 1900 videos is titled, ‘Discussions’. In the ‘Discussions’ playlist, the titles and the headings written on the cover photos suggest more often than not, a serious tension between the pairs.<sup>24</sup> One can assume a show full of tension between the MIL and DIL pairs if they come across these videos. The full episodes however, if watched attentively from beginning until the end paint a different picture than these videos. The instances where the MIL and DIL pairs having each other’s back are more frequent than their having a dispute. The conflict element usually comes from the discussions with the other contestant pairs.

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<sup>24</sup> Some examples to these videos can be: The video (2019a) titled, “Tension Between Gülcan and Besime Moved Them to Tears” with “If we get a divorce, it’s because of you!” written on the cover photo; another video (2019b) titled “Fatma Hanım Said that She Didn’t Want Dilek” with “I didn’t take you willingly!” written on the cover photo and the video titled, “Elif: ‘My Mother-in-Law didn’t Pay for My Henna Night’” with “Your Henna Night, your expense!” written on the cover photo. In all these videos cover photos consist of the DIL’s and MIL’s close up photos of their faces full of emotion, side by side.

As far as the power relations between the MILs and the DILs are considered, an observably structured dynamic is present. Terms like ‘managing’ and ‘being in power’ are uttered rather frequently by the MILs while the dynamic between the pair is discussed. Before examining these dynamics, however, how the relationship itself is defined in the show must be explained.

### **3.2.3.1. Relationship Between the MILs and DILs**

Prejudices about this relationship as mentioned in the previous chapter stand as a defining element for it in popular culture. In a similar vein, while MIL and DIL pairs talk about their relationship in the show, they are seen defining their relationship in relation to the common stereotypes about this relationship. Being a MIL, for example have obvious negative connotations and when a MIL says something that her DIL probably wouldn’t like, other contestants say to her, “Sen de tam *kaynanasın!*” meaning that she is exactly like a MIL. In the episode dated 14 December 2018, Ziyafet who, as mentioned before, is famous for her traditional point of view regarding the MIL and DIL relationship and her dominancy over her DIL is chosen as ‘the most *kaynana* (MIL)’ by the DILs as part of a game they play. This discourse about being a MIL normalizes the tension between the pair whereas a harmonious relationship between the pair becomes deviational.

Usually the new contestants are asked about how they perceive their relationship. The pairs answer the question by likening it to other relationship forms despite the idiosyncrasy of it. The mother-daughter relationship is the most prominent comparison for the MIL and DIL relationship as in Turkey, a DIL is expected to address her MIL as ‘mother’ traditionally. One of the DILs’ refusal to address her MIL as ‘mother’, for example is interpreted as being disrespectful by other MILs in as encountered in YouTube video titled, “I don’t want to call my MIL mother!” (Gelinim Mutfakta,

2018b). Addressing a MIL as ‘mother’ here is presented as a sign of respect instead of affection. When the DIL explains herself by saying that no one can be a substitute for her own mother her MIL retorts with “I bought you a house and the most stylish furniture. What could I do more?” This retort reveals certain expectations regarding the idealized MIL and DIL relationship. The MIL, as a part of the groom’s family, is expected to financially support the DIL and her newly-formed family unit and the DIL is expected to become part of the extended family and fulfil her duty of care, in return. The MIL, in this instance implies that as she fulfilled her traditional duties as a MIL and therefor earned her right to be called ‘mother’ as that is what a MIL should be called by her DIL, traditionally. Money comes out as a recurring theme for the MIL and DIL relationship in the show and it will be examined in a later part of this section.

Although the answer is obvious, the question of if a MIL can be like a mother, is a frequently visited one. One of the DILs, Rümeyşa is criticized by other DILs for having from her wedding which features only her side of the family on her kitchen compartment. Rümeyşa who is married for only over a year and her MIL, Nezahat are introduced as the new contestants on the episode dated 10 December 2018. In their first day a discussion begins when one of the DILs notices the photo Rümeyşa brought with her which was taken on her wedding day and asks that why her MIL Nezahat is absent from the photo. Rümeyşa explains that as her part of the family lives in another city, she misses them and when the production asked her to bring something she liked to put on her table, she brought this photo. In a true reality show fashion, one of the DILs then asks her whether if she doesn’t like her MIL to which Rümeyşa answers with, “If I didn’t like her, would I come to this show with her?”. This debate beginning on Monday carries over until the Friday’s episode, turning into a discussion about whether a MIL can be like a mother for the DIL or not. Throughout all of this, Rümeyşa’s own MIL, Nezahat is on her side, defending her, and even crying with her when she breaks into tears for missing her family at home. Nezahat states that, she understands Rümeyşa

completely as she visits her own mother frequently. A certain kind of companionship comes in view in this situation where the pair recognizes that they share the same pain of dislocation, having to leave your birth-family behind in order to be part of another family. All contestants who share this painful experience of dislocation agree on the fact that a MIL can't be a substitute for a mother. Yet another thing that is agreed upon is although a MIL is not a mother, discriminating between your mother and MIL is still not acceptable. In other words, the pretense of the mother-daughter resemblance regarding the affection is agreed upon yet the expression of this pretense is not acceptable within the discourse of the show as it will distort the patriarchal family order.

The mother-daughter resemblance not only involves the affection factor but also the authority factor of it too. Similar to the relationship between a mother and her minor daughter, a MIL is expected to educate and control her DIL, traditionally. In the episode dated 18 May 2020, one of the MILs, Fatma in an attempt to defend her relationship with her DIL, Dilek -which is found to be problematic by other MILs as Dilek is said to have a short temper- says that, "A MIL should manage her 'children' just like a mother does. Dilek is a nervous and an angry person as she had lived in Adana. She could not adapt to İstanbul. I was working so I couldn't take care of her." "Taking care of", in this context, is unmistakably implies to a parental authority as she herself refers to 'managing' like a mother in the same dialog. Since she was working when her son got married, she implies that she couldn't fulfil her MIL duties of educating her DIL. This authoritative position is also supported by a class distinction in this instance as the rural roots of Dilek is implied to be the reason for her temper and need for care. Because of their cultural differences, Fatma and Dilek's relationship is presented to be a conflicting one throughout the episodes they were in. Despite this they are seen defending each other when one of them is criticized by the other contestants.

Although the mother-daughter resemblance reveals to be problematic, the companionship is indisputable for the MIL and DIL pairs competing in the show. Even the most incompatible pairs have a certain degree of amicability with each other. Yet the power dynamic between them is whole another subject.

### 3.2.3.2. Power Dynamics Between MILs and DILs

The show's structure positions the MILs higher than the DILs in terms of power as explained while the format is examined. Accordingly, the MILs appear to have more power in their relationship between the DILs. The MILs' discourse, no matter how good their relationship with their DILs are, usually point to a keenly structured power dynamic where they are in the position of power.

In a YouTube video titled, "Why did Fatih Ürek snapped at Hüsniye *Hanım*?" (Gelinim Mutfakta, 2018a), during a discussion between the MILs -happening in their section of the studio resembling a living-room- about what it means to be a MIL today, one of the MILs says that instead of seeing herself as a MIL she sees herself as a friend to her DIL. Another MIL, Hüsniye who is famous for her very strict ideas on how MILs and DILs behave, strongly objects this by saying the following<sup>25</sup>:

Being a friend is unlikely, let's say something like a friend. The daughter-in-law and the mother-in-law can't be friends. They can be something like friends because there is a 'position' and 'rank' difference between them. (...) The daughter-in-law after getting married got a rank but the mother-in-law's rank is one point higher. As the mother-in-law is in a higher position, she speaks more. The daughter-in-law can't speak more than the mother-in-law.

The terms 'position' and 'rank' with their bureaucratic and military connotations imply to a structured power dynamic. The power in family, according to Hüsniye is not a fluctuating one but rather very hierarchical. This power which is granted through the

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<sup>25</sup> See the Appendix F for the Turkish dialogue.

institution of marriage, however is very patriarchal in its nature. Her remarks however are objected by both the MILs and the DILs in the show and also the host for being too outdated. Her exaggeration for using these military terms were criticized while the what she meant was not refuted completely.

Speaking more is a frequently mentioned sign of power. The MIL and DIL where the DIL speaks more or even louder than her MIL are criticized by other contestants for their unusual power dynamic. The right to speak is correlated with age in Turkish culture as older people are expected to be more experienced than the younger ones. Age and experience, in this context, becomes a source of power. This experience and the power it grants to the MILs are also acknowledged by the format as obvious from the section where the DILs consult the MILs about how the dish of the day should be cooked. The DILs who refuse to listen their MILs' advices during this section are also criticized for being disrespectful. The DILs are expected to listen their MILs' advices even if they already know how to do it, just to be respectful. This expectation while implying a strict power dynamic between the pair, also reveal the pretentious nature of this relationship.

Age, in addition to the right to speak, may also grant the right to control. Similar to Yakalı-Çamoğlu's (2017) analysis on the power dynamics between MILs and DILs in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century Turkey, money and by who it is controlled is frequently discussed in the show. Although most of the MIL and DIL pairs in the show live in separate households, the DILs are expected to consult the MILs about issues related to money. As most of the MILs still support their sons and DILs financially to some degree, they expect to control how the money -some of which they provided- is spent in their DILs' household. In this regard, money becomes a source of power. As most of the DILs in the competition are in the early years of a marriage while the MILs' age differentiates between 40 and 60, the MILs are in a more advantageous position socio-economically.

Although the common assumption is that the MILs as they get older will need the care of their DILs, making the DILs more advantageous, the demographics of the show are not appropriate for interrogating this assumption.

There are other instances where the DILs appear to have more power than the MILs. *Beauty*, similar to Yakalı-Çamoğlu (2017) notes, manifests itself as a source of power between the pairs. Accordingly to the dominant discourse about the MILs who envy the beauty and youth of their DILs, the MILs in the show frequently discuss their physical appearances and compare themselves to their DILs. These instances are presented as comic reliefs in the show, accompanied by a playful background music. While the MILs request the justification of their DILs regarding their weight, style and beauty in general, the DILs are seen, more often than not, criticizing their MILs for not dressing appropriate for their 'ages'. Their youth and beauty are utilized as sources of power by the DILs in these instances.

Another issue where DILs appear to be more powerful than the MILs is the childcare. As mothers of their grandchildren, the DILs are the decision makers on issues regarding these children. Even though it is not frequently discussed, childcare stands out as a subject where the DILs are considerably more powerful and MILs more often than not complain about this. They complain about not having a say on how to name the children and also about how their previous experiences regarding childcare are usually ignored by the DILs.

All these findings reveal that the power dynamic between the pairs that is represented in the show is in accordance with the dominant discourse and the common stereotypes about this relationship. Yet they don't stand out as the main narrative of the episodes despite being featured in the trailers and the YouTube videos very frequently. More often than not, this dynamic reveals itself through format elements rather than

spontaneous dialogs. So ‘representation’ became a keyword here as format itself highlights the power factor in this relationship rather than the contestants.

### **3.3. *Zuhal Topal’la Sofrada* (At the Dinner with Zuhal Topal)**

#### **3.3.1. Format Description and Analysis**

*Zuhal Topal’la Sofrada* has started to be broadcast in 2018 in the FOX which is a national channel owned by the Walt Disney Company. The program’s host, Zuhal Topal was an actress who became a household name as a marriage show host. Her last marriage show which was cancelled because of the emergency decree, *Zuhal Topal’la (With Zuhal Topal)* was also broadcast in the FOX channel. As obvious by even its denomination, this new format was a successful attempt to fill the void of this marriage show. Although it will be addressed more in detail in later parts, Zuhal Topal’s positioning in the show strongly resembles her marriage show host persona further approximating the show to the precursor marriage shows.

The format is very similar to *Come Dine with Me*, the internationally acclaimed British game show whose adaptation *Yemekteyiz (We are at the Dinner)* had become a staple of daytime television in Turkey since its first broadcast in 2008. The similarity even became a matter in dispute and the production company was sued in 2019 by Acun Ilıcalı, a media mogul and the owner of the channel in which *Yemekteyiz* was broadcast (Sözcü, 2019). The case was dismissed on the grounds that a format could not be accounted as a work of art and therefore could not be asked to be protected (Cumhuriyet, 2020). The production company of *Zuhal Topal’la Sofrada* which was owned by Zuhal Topal herself and her husband defended the show by stating that it was the adaptation of an internationally registered format called “*Momsters*” (Global Agency). İzzet Pinto, the owner of Global Agency which is *Momsters*’ distribution company later stated in

an interview that the format was developed by three Turkish developers and it was first licensed in Russia and Greece. He also added that formats may resemble each other yet they are distinguished by different formulations. And the formulation of the *Momsters*' was that it was a MIL and DIL cooking competition (Doğan, 2018).

### **3.3.1.1. The Format**

In the format of the show, five teams consisting of MIL and DIL pairs compete over the course of five days to be the best dinner host in terms of taste, table arrangements and 'hospitality'. The twist is that, the DILs are the ones who prepare the dinner while MILs can only assist and lead them verbally and MILs are the ones who eat the dinner together with the host. DILs are expected to prepare the dinner, set the table and later serve it to the guests consisting of MILs and the host all by themselves. The show also has an off-screen commentator who engage with the host and the contestants, famously called 'the Mixer'. The Mixer has a distinctive masculine voice and usually teases the contestants by provoking or snitching on them. This male commentator is a common element for the Turkish daytime shows that are using real locations such as houses, malls, etc. instead of television studios.

As for the flow of the show, each day starts with the Mixer's brief introduction of the show, the contestants of the day and the host. Later the host enters the house of the contestants and welcomed by the MIL and DIL pair accompanied by other family members such as DIL's husband, sister-in-law, mother, etc. The show host and the family sit together in the living room and engage in a conversation usually about topics like how the couple met and how is the relationship between the MIL and the DIL.



**Figure 3.5.** Zuhal Topal (on the right) sits with the MIL and the DIL of the day accompanied by the son/husband and the mother of the DIL (on the couch from right to left, respectively) in the episode dated 14 December 2018

Later on the DIL tells her menu for the day and goes for grocery shopping with the money that is given by the show. The menu is immediately discussed by other MILs in the confessionals in terms of if its difficulty and tastefulness. During these discussions, the other MILs almost always refer to their own experiences about the dishes on the menu indicating with comments like, “This would take only ten minutes for me”, indicating a comparison with the contestant DILs despite the fact that their DILs are the rivals of the DIL instead of themselves. While the DIL is gone shopping, the host talks with the MIL and other family members about the DIL. The DIL on the other hand are asked questions about her MIL by the Mixer while shopping. After the DIL comes home, the other family members leave the house and the contestants together with the show host take their places in their kitchen. While the DIL starts cooking, the MIL and the host sit on the kitchen table and the three converse about previous days. After a while, the host leaves the MIL-DIL pair by themselves although the Mixer is still present.

The MIL tries to assist her DIL by controlling the taste of the dishes and reminding her about the remaining time and what she needs to do but does not have the option to help her physically. If she finishes all her menu on time, the DIL sets the table and then change her outfit to welcome the other MILs and the host as their dinner guests. The other MILs come one by one and meet with the DIL. The confessionals about their first impressions or opinions are thrown in and there.

After all MILs and the host arrive they sit on the big dinner table arranged in a U shape with two rival MILs are being set on the right side and two on the left side while the show host and the day's contestant MIL sit together in the middle of them. The menu consisting of, soup, hors d'oeuvres, main course and the dessert starts to be served one by one by the DIL.



**Figure 3.6** The contestants and the host waiting for the first course of the dinner to be served in the episode dated 18 May 2020.

While the rival MILs criticize the dishes, the MIL who is the contestant of the day is tasked with defending her DIL's cooking skills since other than the times she serves or is called to be asked questions, the DIL is not present in the dining room with them.

After each course, the DIL comes to collect the empty plates, the MILs and the host give a brief version of their criticism to the DIL. The DIL, on the other hand, is expected to take the criticism with respect and if she is to object, she is reprimanded by the other MILs. When all the courses are finished and the table is cleaned the MILs and the host take their previous places in the table and the DIL stands beside her MIL to wait for the open scoring of the MILs. The four rival MILs reveal the scores they wrote on small boards one by one and they are expected to justify their scoring by giving explanations. At the end of the day, we see the score the show host gave to the DIL although the contestants learn it at the end of the week. On Friday, all DILs and MILs meet in the house of the Friday's contestants and the winner is announced by the host. The winner takes the monetary prize worth 10,000 TRY which is in the form of a cheque put on small chest reminiscent of a dowery chest.

### **3.3.1.2. Change in the Format During the Covid-19 Outbreak**

Originally, the show was shot on location, in the households of the contestants. However, due to pandemic restrictions, a villa with a pool became the studio of the show. The first episode shot in this new villa was aired in April 6<sup>th</sup> of 2020, only 29 days after the first Covid-19 case in Turkey was announced by the Ministry of Health (2020). During that time, a legal lockdown was not even ordered by the government (The Economist, 2020) yet the production companies of several television series on air had announced that they were taking a break from shooting because of the pandemic (Duvar, 2020). This break became longer than expected and for a period of time, daytime reality shows together with *Survivor*'s local version airing on primetime, became the only sources of entertainment that is produced for television in Turkey.

*Zuhal Topal'la Sofrada* became one of these daytime television shows that never took a break from airing partly thanks to this location change. This location change was

announced by Zuhal Topal herself in the mentioned episode where she gave a tour of the inside of the villa to the viewers at home and expressed her excitement by saying, “I am the mistress of the house, *ayol*<sup>26</sup>”<sup>27</sup> This location change surely effected the format of the show as the sections such as shopping and meeting with the other family members were eliminated. Although Zuhal Topal became the ‘mistress’ like she herself expressed, the contestant pairs are expected to bring their own decorations to the table and they are still treated as the hostesses of the evening while other MILs and Zuhal Topal is treated as guests.

Despite this location change which was made for diminishing the number of people involved in shooting, however, there was still a risk of transmission of Covid-19 for both the contestants and the production as the contestants consisting of 10 people total were changing every week. This risk was harshly criticized in the social media (Sözcü, 2020) so another precaution was made eventually, in December which is to assign specially designed face shields to host and the contestants. These face fitted shields are see through and medically unapproved yet the contestants are expected to wear them other than the instances where they are tasting the food, which is surprisingly not often than the instances where they are talking with each other. As of today, the show continues in the same villa without any breaks with the face shields still present and apart from the obvious format change, the pandemic is rarely referred in the narrative of the show.

### **3.3.1.3. The Scoring System**

The scoring system has changed many times over the course of the show. Although the contestants score the dinners between 1 and 10, giving a score of 1 or 2 was prohibited

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<sup>26</sup> A slang for addressing which is defined as “a word that is generally used by women” by the official dictionary of the Turkish Language Association.

<sup>27</sup> “Ay ev sahibesi benim ayol.”

by the format if there wasn't any absent dish from the menu. This change was justified by the MILs' inclination of giving the minimum scores to other DILs in order to make their own DILs the winner. After this change, however, the score of 3 became the most given score of the show and the outcome didn't change. So a new rule was introduced: Apart from the cases where there was an absent dish, the minimum score was 3 but all score points could be used only one time by the MILs. This new rule was affective in changing the previous strategies of the MILs and directed them to adapt new strategies. Although the alliances made by the MILs off-cameras are strongly discouraged by the format, the tension rising from the unfair or vengeful scorings are strongly welcomed as obvious from the "coming up next" clips which usually foreground these instances.

### 3.3.2. Position of the Host



**Figure 3.7.** Zuhall Topal in the official poster for the show

Zuhall Topal, born in 1976, is a professionally trained actress who appeared in various comedy series before reaching fame as a marriage show host in the 2010. This position which was critical for shaping her host persona came after her brief guest appearance in a comedy television series, *Papatyam* (Star TV, 2009) in which she played the role

of a marriage show host (Vatan, 2019). She herself had described her role in the series as impersonating famous marriage show hosts and revealed that this role was effective on the producer's choosing her as a host. During her marriage show host period, she was praised for her entertainment skills and good communication with the participants some of whom were advanced in years. Despite her insistence on defining herself as an actress, what made her loved by people was mostly this host persona of her.

Her comedic skills are a dominant feature of her host persona in *Zuhal Topal'la Sofrada* as she is usually seen impersonating the contestants, the MILs in particular. These impersonations, however, are approved by the contestants themselves too and they are seen laughing together with Zuhal Topal. More often than not, the contestants announce their admiration for Zuhal Topal and state her presence as one of their reasons for applying to compete in the show. Before the cooking stage begins, they treat her with homemade pastries and desserts and even give her homemade goods as presents such as sauces and jams for her to take home with. All these treats are welcomed by Zuhal Topal even though she jokingly protests for gaining weight because of them. Zuhal Topal, in these early stage of the daily flow, positions herself similar to a house guest.

While she interrogates the contestants about their relationship, she is usually seen asking provoking questions regarding the relationship between the pairs. Despite her efforts however, the contestant pairs, who voluntarily participated in the competition together as a team remark on how well their relationship is going. If one of the parties complain about the other, she gives concrete advices using terms of generalization or certainty.

Her advices on intra-familial relations comes from her own experience to the contrary of *Gelinim Mutfakta*'s host Fatih Ürek, as Zuhal Topal is 'happily' married for thirteen years to the producer of the show, Korhan Sayginer and this 'happily' marriage grants

her the expert status. The fact that the show is produced by a married couple further approximates the atmosphere of the show to that of a family household atmosphere. In the official site of the show's production company (Dual Medya Produksiyon) which is owned by the married couple themselves, the company is defined as a "family company". The couple who boasts of being low-key and staying out of the public eye, doesn't refrain from sharing family photos together with their daughter and extended families, further consolidating their image of a perfect family. Zuhall Topal's show host persona heavily relies on this good wife and good mother image which she also portrays on interviews and through social media.

The touch of 'gossipy neighborhood aunty' which was integral to Fatih Ürek's host persona like mentioned before, is present in Zuhall Topal's host persona too. More than being a personality trait, however, this aunty persona comes out as a format element in *Zuhall Topal'la Sofrada*. While the DILs go shopping for the cooking ingredients, Zuhall Topal stays with the MIL and their family guests -who usually state that they came to see Zuhall Topal in person- and starts asking provoking questions about the DILs with a gossipy attitude. While they gossip about the DIL however, the DIL herself is interrogated about her relationship with her MIL by Mixer, who will be analyzed in the following part. Although the questions she directs to both parties carry the aim of setting them against each other such as, whether their DIL is insolent or their MIL is growly, they are always presented in a rather light mood with cheerful sound effects resembling a comedy show.

Her persona however, gets more hegemonic when the dinner period begins. During this period, she is seen reprimanding the MILs for making false comments regarding the taste of the dishes. Considering the fact that palate is a fairly subjective topic, these reprimands reveal themselves to be instances where her hegemonic position of the host is exercised explicitly. When the DILs are harshly criticized as far as she is concerned,

she doesn't refrain from defending them against other MILs revealing her fairness which is a trait she frequently boasts of. This position of being a person who grants justice is further consolidated in the scoring period of the show where the MILs giving lower scores are reprimanded by her with a very harsh tone. She accuses these MILs for being unfair and addresses their consciousness and even threatens them of being disqualified from the competition. Until this day, two contestants were eliminated from the competition by Zuhail Topal herself, for being unfair and not acting appropriate to the format of the show. As she herself acts as a jury too, however, the unfairness of the MILs are corrected by her at the end of the day. While all the MILs write their scores at the same time and doesn't have the option to change them according to other MILs' scores, Zuhail Topal gives her scores at the end of the day, knowing the final result of that day's scoring, positioning her as a final jury. This gives her the chance of 'correcting' the unfair scoring of the MILs as implied by her usual remarks on the final day of the week when the winner is announced. "Once again" she says, "the justice has won."

This discourse of justice which is integral to the show reveals itself in the scoring system changes that happened many times through the course of the show. When giving a score below 3 for the tables that don't lack any dishes written on the menu is banned, Zuhail Topal announced this new rule by saying that "I' banned it." implying her hegemony over both the contestants and the format itself. This hegemonic position does not only comes from her position as a final jury or the show host, but also from her position of the show producer which is not put out of sight by the format despite not being highlighted frequently.

In conclusion, Zuhail Topal's host persona may be said to consist of two different personas revealing itself in different stages of the show. In the beginning of the day, before the dinner, she positions herself as an affectionate house guest full of jokes while

in the dinner stage she acts as a final jury, establishing justice for the show. Both faces of this personas are consolidated by her own identity; the first from her identity as a happily-married mother and the other is the co-owner of a family production company.

### **3.3.3. Position of the Off-voice ‘The Mixer’**

The Mixer, the off-voice persona of the show is actually a staple of daytime television shows in Turkey. This male voice whose roots can be traced back to the tabloid press shows in the 1990s, became a prominent part of Turkish daytime television with another daytime cooking show, *Yemekteyiz* which was mentioned before as the show *Zuhal Topal’la Sofrada* was accused of being ripped-off from. The original intention of this off-voice persona was to act as a moderator for the shows that were shot on locations if they lacked a presenter or a host. *Yemekteyiz*, originally, was a daytime show without a host and the off-voice’s presence was a prominent part of the show. This off-voice persona was different from the reality TV narrator that is accustomed of in the Anglo-American shows. This off-voice persona had little to do with narrating since apart from making a small introduction of the show, he was heard engaging with the contestants as if a real person instead of an omniscient narrator. The off-voice is presented as the voice behind the camera as the camera movements were in harmony with the voice.

The Mixer in the show is an example of this overly used daytime TV element. His name comes from the kitchen appliance whose Turkish name (*kariştirici*) connotes with ‘trouble maker’ in Turkish (*ortalık kariştıran*) as he is represented to be a character who sets people up against each other. The Mixer with its deep male voice is understood to represent the whole production team behind the camera and despite his chit chats and squabbles with the contestants, can be accepted to be a distant relative of the “Voice of God”, the omniscient voice-over commentor of the classical

documentary, implying a position of absolute power through his unlimited knowledge and unquestionable mastery (Wolfe, 1997). Just like the Voice of God, the Mixer has the most knowledge albeit this knowledge is limited to the world of the show. He is seen snitching on the contestants implying this “all-knowing” position, granting him a power unmatched by either the contestants nor the host. The fact that this power is granted to a male voice in an otherwise female-only world of the show is worth remarking as it undoubtedly hints to a patriarchal discourse where men are positioned as the experts on even the subjects related to female experiences.

Despite this power however, he is seen engaging with the contestants in a manner reminiscent of a son or a little brother. He is seen addressing the MILs as ‘mother’ and always use the singular ‘you’ while addressing them instead of the formal plural ‘you’. Similar to Zuhair Topal’s gossipy attitude during the early stages of the day, he makes jokes and funny comments about the MIL and DIL pairs. The instances where he tries to provoke the pairs for confronting each other reveal that the Mixer in fact represents the production team behind camera, trying to create conflict in order to have an enjoyable narrative for the viewers.

The Mixer’s presence becomes more prominent in the instances where the show host is absent. During the dinner stage, his presence remains limited to the kitchen where he is seen interacting with the DIL as the host is in the living room, eating together with the MILs. Since his presence serves the purpose of comic relief in general, his absence in the dinner table makes more sense as the atmosphere in the dinner table is almost never funny.

Despite being a funny character and acting as a comic relief, the Mixer has still more power than the contestants which is granted through his unlimited knowledge regarding the world of the show. And while exercising this power, he almost always speak from

a patriarchal point of view regarding the relationship between MILs and DILs, making him another discursive element of the show.

### **3.3.4. Power Relations Between the MILs and DILs**

The relationships between the MIL and DIL pairs featured in *Zuhal Topal'la Sofrada* is quite different from *Gelinim Mutfakta* as in the first one, the pairs are seen together only for one episode besides their brief appearances together in the final day. In addition, the format of *Zuhal Topal'la Sofrada* gives the chance to see a variety of MIL and DIL pairs as the contestants change every week. The fact that, in every episode, a different pair and their dynamic is introduced in the space of their own houses -before the pandemic as explained above- makes it a more feasible platform to see the contemporary representations of this relationship.

The MILs in this show, however, overshadow the DILs as they are the ones who the viewers get the chance of getting accustomed to over the period of five days whereas the DILs are only present during the day they are competing. Adding the fact that they are not even present on the table while the dinner is eaten by the MILs during that day, it is certain that the MILs have the leading part in this show. Despite all this which clearly positions the MILs higher in terms of power by the format's discursive formation, the individual dynamics between the pairs hint to a whole another situation.

#### **3.3.4.1. Relationship Between MILs and DILs**

During the brief period where the pairs in *Zuhal Topal'la Sofrada* are displayed together, despite the continuous efforts of both the Mixer and the host, their harmony and companionship stands out. In the sample episodes of this thesis, pairs from different socio-economic backgrounds were featured. Some of these pairs knew each

other for over ten years while some for less than a year. There were pairs who were living together and there were pairs who live in separate households. The one thing in common among these pairs, however, was how well their relationship with each other seemed to be. These good representations may have been related to these pairs' desire of portraying their relationship in accordance with what is endorsed by the society. Even though the relationship between MILs and DILs are expressed to be problematic by popular culture and also in dominant discourse, a public dispute between them is still condemned by the very same discourse itself. Yakalı-Çamoğlu (2017) mentions the same contradiction that reveals itself through the discourse of the women she interviewed who denied having a strained relationship with their MILs by saying that "There wasn't a that kind of thing in our family"<sup>28</sup>. Nevertheless, just like in *Gelinim Mutfakta*, the fact that these MIL and DIL pairs chose to be on the show together indicate a certain degree of intimacy between them and for the purpose of this study, their own statements about the nature of their relationship will be taken into consideration.

While living together is believed to create a conflict between MILs and DILs, the pair competing in the episode dated 12 December 2018 who live together for seven years, since the DIL Sude's marriage, reveal to have a rather peaceful co-habitation. The MIL Meryem is presented to be an extremely dominant one as she herself states that she is the decision maker in the household and all family members give the money they earned to her in order for her to manage the household budget. Meryem even explicitly says that Sude never objects to her decisions and does whatever she requests her to do. Sude confirms all these with a smiling face and says that she is used to this and adds that, this way all the responsibility also belongs to her MIL. This power dynamic, therefor, reveals itself to be a mutual decision where both parties are pleased. Their

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<sup>28</sup> "Bizde öyle şey olmazdı."

harmony during the day and their intimate communication also prove that they are in fact happy with their relationship.

The host and the Mixer do not refrain from interrogating the pair on whether or not they are truly satisfied about this dynamic. The host asks the Sude, if are there any subjects that they are not agreeing on and having a problem over, to which she replies with, “the childcare”. Sude states that she was working for the first six years of her marriage and during this period, her MIL, Meryem, was responsible of the childcare. This explanation reveals another benefit for Sude for living together with her MIL. The childcare, which is otherwise a rather expensive expense item for a family budget is compensated by the MIL. This living arrangement is also in accordance with the current family discourse in Turkey where the elders in the family are expected and encouraged to undertake the responsibility of childcare if both parents are working.

Another stereotype about this relationship which is the DIL’s intervening with the MIL and her son’s relationship is subverted by a pair whose DIL states that they are getting along so good that even her fiancé is getting uncomfortable with their relationship. The contestants of episode dated 18 May 2020 consisting of the MIL Sevda and her DIL Büşra are referred in the beginning of the episode by the Mixer as being a *kanka* (homie) for each other, a nickname both Sevda and Büşra carry proudly. Büşra is engaged for seven months and they state that the wedding ceremony was postponed because of the Covid-19 outbreak and after the ceremony, they will be living next door from each other. They are happy about this living arrangement as also evident from the fact that Büşra even addresses Sevda as her new ‘homie’. Sevda, similar to the tradition of arranged marriage, is the one who liked Büşra -who was already a friend of her son- in the first place and persuaded her son to marry her. She remarks on how she even helped her son planning the marriage proposal. This pair’s extremely good relationship which is likened to a friendship by both parties subverts the discourse that a friendship

between a MIL and DIL is not possible because of the traditional power dynamics between them, which was briefly mentioned in the analysis of *Gelinim Mutfakta*.

This good relationship however, is met with scrutiny by the host and Mixer. While Büşra shares her excitement for living near to her MIL as they are already getting along so well, the host retorts back by saying that this good relationship will last until they start living near each other by adding that, “Just wait and see what happens when you don’t open her door or go somewhere without letting her know.” This type of cynicism and negativism reveal both the host’s position of power and the discourse of the format on how the relationship between the pair can’t be considered independently of a power structure where one try to control the other. The possibility of equivalence, which is clearly the case for Büşra and Sevda’s relationship is ruled out by the host and their intimacy is demoted to be a whim instead of the true nature of their relationship.

There are pairs where the DIL is represented as the dominant one in the relationship which is perceived to be atypical in the context of Turkey. This type of dynamic is found strange by both the host and the Mixer as revealed by their constant questioning through the course of the show. An example to this occur in the episode dated 22 May 2020 where the MIL Leyla and her DIL, Ferrah, for six years compete. This atypical dynamic is hinted early on in the episode when Leyla says to the host that her DIL, Ferrah, never addressed her as ‘mother’ to which Ferrah remarks that she couldn’t do that as she already had her own mother and father. This refusal is met with condemnation by both the host and the Mixer despite Leyla’s comments on how she understands Ferrah as she herself was not able to address her father-in-law as ‘father’. The Mixer differentiates between a father-in-law and a MIL, however, and says that these two situations can’t be compared. This differentiation reveals, once again, that the MIL and DIL is perceived to be something more than an in-law relation in the Turkish context.

The thing that is found the most strange about Leyla and Ferrah's dynamic, however, is the division of labor. Leyla states that as Ferrah is working and also has a child, despite living in separate households, she comes and cleans her house for her with the help of her son. The fact that the son and the MIL do the cleaning instead of the DIL herself bewilders the host and the Mixer as it obviously subverts the discourse on traditional gender and family roles where the younger women are expected to undertake the responsibility of domestic chores. Leyla, on the other hand, insists that she loves her DIL, Ferrah, and feels sad for her as she is working so much. She also states that, she feels home at Ferrah's house as Ferrah never objects to her meddling with the house. Feeling at home in the house of her DIL, in this instances, can even said to be a privilege on the part of the MIL as in the contemporary dynamics of this relationship, the MILs who live in separate households may refrain from visiting the house of their DILs in order not to disturb them, further distancing them from their sons (Ekal, 2006, p. 8). So in return of her assistance in domestic chores like cooking and cleaning, Leyla is able to frequently visit her son's house and become a regular part of his and grandchildren's lives. The rather unconventional dynamic between the pair, thus, once again reveals itself to be a mutual agreement where both parties benefit from.

In all these instances and many more that is encountered when the episodes are watched in detail, the harmony between the MIL and DIL pairs stand out instead of a conflicting dynamic. Therefor the element of conflict, which is necessary for the narrative of the reality competition show format is provided from the other communications in the show. As mentioned before, the host and the Mixer are frequently positioned as opposed to the MIL and DIL pairs who are portrayed to be in harmony as they are seen advocating for a traditional dynamic between the pair where power structure is more evident. Another opposition to the peaceful relationship between the MIL and DIL

pairs come from the other contestant MILs. The conflict between the MILs, therefore becomes an essential element for the narrative of the show.

#### **3.3.4.2. Power Relations Among the Contestant MILs**

Similar to the host and the Mixer, the contestant MILs are seen in expectation of a rather traditional dynamic between the MIL and DIL pairs. This expectation can be said to be encouraged by the format of the show as they are all sitting on a dinner table together while the DIL of the day serves them. The DILs, are harshly criticized by other MILs for their abilities as a cook, a host and even a DIL in the instances where they don't approve the way the DIL communicate with her own MIL. Through the discursive practices of the format, the ideal DIL is defined as a quiet and respectful one who finishes her preparations on time, presents a tasteful dinner table, serves her dishes quickly to her guests and even dresses elegantly while doing so. If a DIL fails to fulfil even one of this expectations, she fails as a DIL. Her MIL, however, as the only person who can defend her at the table fails even more and condemned by the other MILs since she is the one who should have trained her DIL to perform her DIL duties in the first place.

So the conflict of *Zuhal Topal'la Sofrada*, mostly arises from the rather unrealistic expectations -which is the result of an outdated image of an ideal DIL- of the other MILs whose obvious hypocrisy is manifested through their own relationship with their DILs which itself is more often than not unconventional, but all very fine, nevertheless. Despite the idiosyncratic relationships the MILs are portrayed to have with their own DILs on the day they compete, they reflect a rather traditional perspective regarding the other MIL and DIL relationships. They are seen disparaging the other DILs for as little as talking back when their food is criticized. These actions can be read as

performances where the MILs act according to the prevalent discourse on what it means to be a MIL or a DIL.

The dinner table where the five MILs and the host sit together, in this context, becomes a stage where performances of MIL are manifested and contested. Even though the MIL herself does refrain from exercising power over her DIL, the other MILs shamelessly do so in order to consolidate their positions as MILs. They are seen lecturing the other DILs on subjects like how they should behave with their own MILs, how to prepare a more sophisticated dinner table and how to serve guests. These instances are addressed as lecturing instead of advices for a reason here. The MILs' position of power against the DILs is highlighted by first, the format that allocates the MILs as the juries and the DILs as the contestants; and secondly, their mere position as MILs.



**Figure 3.8** The final meeting of the contestants for the announcement of the winner during the episode of the week dated 22 May 2020 which is shot on the house the show uses as a location during the Covid-19 outbreak

Similar to the 'rank' and 'position' difference between MILs and DILs referred by Hüsniye in *Gelinim Mutfakta* as mentioned before, the MILs in *Zuhal Topal'la Sofrada*

are positioned higher than all DILs in the competition and this position of power becomes explicitly evident through their interactions with other DILs in the competition. It is even evident from the sitting arrangements for the announcement of the winner during the final day. In the house that is used as the shooting location during the Covid-19 outbreak, all five MILs sit on chairs in a row whereas their DILs remain standing behind them. As the location is obviously big enough for supporting ten chairs instead of five, this sitting arrangement reveals the format's assessment on the hierarchy between MILs and DILs.

The lack of ostensible power dynamics between the individual MIL and DIL pairs in *Zuhal Topal'la Sofrada*, is compensated by the power dynamics between MILs and DILs in general and the power struggle through the MIL identity between the MILs. This fact once again reveals that the relationship between MIL and DIL is deeply affected by the prevalent discourses and stereotypes on it. Even in the instances where the individual dynamics differ from the stereotypes, they are defined in relation to this differences and referred as extra-ordinary.

### **3.4. Comparison and Contrast of the Both Shows**

In both *Gelinim Mutfakta* and *Zuhal Topal'la Sofrada*, despite competing as teams, the MILs are positioned higher than the DILs in terms of power hierarchy through the format structure. While the DILs are the ones who cook, the MILs are the ones who eat and judge the food. Then again, the hosts are positioned as the highest in the power hierarchy in both of these shows as evident from their interactions with the contestants. Despite the formats and which adamantly highlight a certain power dynamic between them and set them at odds, however, the harmony and companionship between MIL and DIL pairs reveal themselves in their own narrative as if leaking through cracks of the formats.

In addition to share the same concept which is focusing on the in-law relationships, both of these shows try to approximate themselves to a domestic space. *Zuhal Topal'la Sofrada* uses real houses of the contestants as shooting locations -at least before the Covid-19 outbreak- whereas *Gelinim Mutfakta* uses a studio designed similar to a house consisting of two sections that resemble a kitchen and a living room. This domesticity that both shows portray, which is in accordance with the overall daytime schedule of Turkey, serves the purpose of coding the spaces of these shows 'feminine' and 'private'. The privacy in question is very much related to the fact that intra familial relationships are confined to the private sphere and their presence on the public sphere is depreciated in the context of Turkey. Thus by creating the illusion of a private sphere through the intimacy of the hosts and location, the discussion of the MIL and DIL relationship is carried to public sphere of television.

These cooking competition shows both of whom came in place of the infamous marriage shows that dominated the daytime schedule of Turkey for years, focus on marriage and institution of family more than cooking. How women in the family should behave, what is appropriate for a MIL or a DIL is discussed instead of how the dishes are cooked. In that sense, these shows come to be public platforms where the identities of MIL and DIL are contested and reconstructed.

Even though both of these shows can be categorized as 'in-law cooking competition shows', however, their narrative styles differ from each other. *Gelinim Mutfakta* mostly relies on reality show elements such as surveillance and continuous story arcs of the contestants. The contestants in *Gelinim Mutfakta* may stay in the competition for an extended period of time which grants them a certain degree of fame. Their long duration on the competition and the fact that they are informed on how their presence is perceived by the audiences through social media, increase the possibility of a conscious performance. This performance together with the format's very polished

reality show narrative in terms of colors, editing and music make detecting the true individual dynamics between the MIL and DIL pairs hard. Most of their individual encounters are initiated by either the host or another format element such as games, hypothetical questions or screening of surveillance videos, in the first place and these initiations more often than not carry the purpose of creating conflict between them. Yet, a close read of the show reveals that most of the time, the companionship between the MILs and DILs overshadows the conflict despite the format's insistence on proving otherwise.

The style of *Zuhal Topal'la Sofrada* is more unpolished than *Gelinim Mutfakta* and therefor closer to that of the marriage shows. This closeness in terms of narrative and style is supported by the fact that the show is presented by a famous marriage shows and has a name similar to that host's previous marriage show as if though it was a sequel. Since the contestants are weekly instead of regular and they are filmed in the space of their own houses, a more unconscious performance occur on the part of the contestants. Contestants consisting of MIL and DIL pairs who apply for the show together, seldom reveal a conflicting relationship. Instead, most of the time they are seen content with the nature of their relationship. This contentment, however, is frequently tried to disarray by the host and the off-voice co-host who advocates for a power struggle between the pair.

The lack of conflict between the MIL and DIL pairs is compensated by the conflict between the MILs in *Zuhal Topal'la Sofrada* which arises from the conflicting ideas on the identities of MIL and DIL. What is interesting is that, these ideas are usually in contradiction with the individual dynamics of these pairs that is portrayed on the show. While the MILs advocate for a more stereotypical and traditional dynamic where the MIL controls and manages the DIL when the other MIL and DIL pairs are in question, their own dynamic their DILs reveals to be different than this dynamic too. This

contradiction may be due to the fact that their idea on how the relationship between a MIL and DIL should be is affected by the dominant discourse more than their own individual dynamic.

Another interesting contrast between the two shows is that their presumed audiences are seem to differ. While the host of *Gelinim Mutfakta* addresses the audience at home as ‘ladies’ or ‘girls’, that is to say referring to a female audience, the host of *Zuhal Topal’la Sofrada* addresses them as ‘ladies and gentlemen’, referring to a more comprehensive -albeit still heteronormative- audience. In addition, the host of *Gelinim Mutfakta* uses slangs just as he uses it with the contestants when addressing the audiences whereas the host of *Zuhal Topal’la Sofrada* almost always addresses the audiences formally. This difference may be due to different time slots that these shows air in. While *Gelinim Mutfakta* airs earlier between 1 PM and 4 PM, *Zuhal Topal’la Sofrada* airs between 4 PM and 7 PM, just before the evening news. So both the gender assumption and the choice between formal and informal address may be due to this scheduling differences. This once again reveals how the scheduling in television is gendered and even class-based -as evident from the use of slang in the early time slot- and how even within the daytime schedule this assumption of gender operates.

## CONCLUSION

Television is a central piece of the family life since its entrance into the households. As it was promoted to be a medium for family entertainment, it can be said that the television contents produced in these early stages were structured to attract the interest of the 'family'. As a matter of fact, who decides, in the name of the 'family', on how and when these contents were viewed became an issue and later a defining factor as 'family' is not a unanimous entity but rather an institution with its own power dynamics. 'Family', in this context "can be described as a patriarchal institution in which father alone wields power" (Foucault, 2003/2006, as cited in Taylor, 2012, p. 214). As a result, the 'father' of the family became a target audience of the family entertainment medium.

With the introduction of daytime schedule, however, another target audience emerged: the 'housewife'. While the primetime and weekend schedule targeted the 'father' in the name of the whole family, the daytime schedule targeted the 'housewife' after her husband and children left the house for their jobs and schools, respectively (Spigel, 1992). Daytime contents in the early years were structured to accompany the 'housewife' on her domestic duties such as cleaning and cooking (Spigel, 1992). In that sense, these daytime shows even became to mimic the workflow of this 'housewife' as the women on screen in daytime were almost always seen while working. There were also structural influences of this assumed audience such as the narrative structure of the soap operas. Modleski (1981, as cited in Kaplan, 1992) revealed how the rhythm of soap operas with their structure of interruptible and multiple narratives was in harmony of the daily work routine of the 'housewife'. As this early stages of daytime programming coincided with the post-war climate in the U.S. and the U.K. where women began to enter the professional life and object their confinement to private sphere, an aggressive discourse that defines womanhood through domesticity and

motherhood came to dominate (Spigel, 1992). So daytime television shows, became ideal stages for reconstructing the traditional discourse on womanhood and family.

Daytime television, in Turkey, was also designed with the assumption of a female audience in its initial stages where the monopoly of the public service broadcaster TRT was in presence. The early daytime shows such as *Kadın ve Evi* and *Kadının Dünyası* were marketed as ‘woman shows’ and can be described as variety shows consisting of sections such as, cooking, home decoration, fashion and beauty (Gün, 2006). With the introduction of private channels, however, the daytime schedule in Turkey began to transform also. New formats such as reality crime shows, morning shows and marriage shows were introduced.

Marriage shows<sup>29</sup> was the most idiosyncratic format of Turkish daytime television where a strange fascination with the ‘family’ became prominent. The marriage show format which dominated the daytime schedule from the early 2000s until their cancellation by an emergency decree in 2017, was different than the Anglo-American dating show formats as they were rather unpolished and not excessively edited and were treated as public matchmaking platforms where marriage was the ultimate goal instead of a monetary prize. The notion of ‘marriage’ was redefined as a “care-based economic alliance” by the discourse of this format and the “care” in question remains gendered as women were expected to provide domestic care while men were expected to provide financial care (Algan, 2010). This definition was also in line with AKP’s current emphasis on ‘family values’ and policies regarding family as an attempt to lessen the state’s responsibility of social care by rebuilding family as an institution of caregiving (Akınerdem, 2019). Despite this heteronormative and conservative discourse on marriage that is endorsed, the marriage shows came to be criticized by conservative section of the public for the public display of courtship as the institution

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<sup>29</sup> *İzdivaç programları.*

of marriage is believed to belong to the private sphere only and the Turkish Directorate of Religion even condemned the format for “ruining the institution of marriage by reducing it to show” (Algan, 2010, p. 199). Feminist organizations, on the other hand, disapproved the way the traditional gender roles and patriarchal practices being represented and recreated through the discourse of the shows (Akınerdem., 2019; Kaya, 2013).

Their unpolished narratives, as a reminiscer of the early daytime phenomenon of morning shows, and the attendance of the studio guests who engage aggressively with the participants created a public platform for the previously taboo topics such as religion, ethnicity, gender roles and modernity to be discussed (Nüfusçu & Yılmaz, 2012; Özsoy, 2012). The marriage shows soon came to be recognized and appreciated for this and their unapologetic portrayal of “the unwanted face of Turkey struggling economically” (Algan, 2010, p. 199) by the media scholars in Turkey (Nüfusçu & Yılmaz, 2012; Özsoy, 2012) despite a general concern regarding the heteronormative discourse of the shows.

Before their cancellation by an emergency decree, nearly every national network were allocating three hour of their daytime schedule to these marriage shows so their abrupt departure resulted in a serious format race. Although marriage shows were no longer in question, the institution of marriage and familial relationships were still daytime schedule’s favorite themes of choice. Various new formats most of whom were competition shows about domestic life such as cooking, cleaning, home decoration, emerged. These trends by virtue of fascination with the domestic sphere, transformed the daytime schedule in Turkey into a microcosm of the domestic life idealized by the conservative discourse where women were seen cooking for their families, cleaning houses and displaying their doweries and their worth was decided through these domestic tasks (Sayan-Cengiz, 2020). In line with the AKP’s biopolitics and discourse

on family values, in the daytime schedule of Turkey, the domestic sphere was displayed to be a strictly feminine sphere. Although among them only *Gelinim Mutfakta* and *Zuhal Topal'la Sofrada* has remained standing, the MIL and DIL cooking competition shows were one of the new format trends that dominated the daytime schedule for a brief period of time in 2019.

Despite being cooking competitions, these MIL and DIL shows were mostly relying on the stereotypically conflict-ridden relationship between MILs and DILs as their narratives. The conflict between this pair is believed to arise from the fluctuating power dynamic between them. Family in this context can be accepted as a site of power, drawing insights from Foucauldian conceptualization of power (Yakalı-Çamoğlu, 2019). Despite the nuclear families' prevalence in terms of living arrangements, the extended families are still psychologically present for most people in Turkey and they act similarly to a support system or a security blanket (Fişek, 1982; Kağıtçıbaşı, 1982; Kocamaner, 2008; Yakalı-Çamoğlu, 2017). As the care of the elder parents is traditionally perceived to be the responsibility of the son and thereby his wife (Timur, 1972, as cited in Fişek, 1982, p. 298) the relationship between the MIL and the DIL came to be a beloved and age-proof subject for television shows. Its stereotypical and sometimes even humorous depictions began to appear in reality shows, television series and even television advertisements (Akyol et al., 2019).

These representations were mostly relying on the conflicts and the disputes between the pair instead of the harmony and the companionship. Despite their emphasis on conflict, however, these television shows were advising the relationship between the pair to resemble a mother-daughter one to the point of even forcing them to address each other as 'mother' and 'daughter'. This resemblance of course is not only in relation to the intimacy of a mother-daughter relationship but it also encourages the power and control exercised in the dynamic of the relationship. With the addition of an

age difference, this relationship became to be represented as a site of power where the MILs are positioned higher through a process of discursive formation. These representations along with their counterparts in other forms of media, undoubtedly were the main reasons of the negative perception of this relationship which eventually turned into prejudices affecting the individual dynamics between MILs and DILs.

In this thesis, how the relationship and the power-relations between the pair is represented in daytime television cooking shows *Gelinim Mutfakta* and *Zuhal Topal'la Sofrada* is examined. In these two shows, the MILs and DILs are positioned as teams competing against other teams while the DILs' duty is to cook for the MILs whereas the MILs' is to eat and judge. A discourse analytical perspective is deployed for the analysis since the notion of 'discourse' calls itself when the subject is power. While the concern with the power relations between the individual pairs remained still, the power relation between the contestants and the format is also examined. Format elements such as, the host, studio design and the structure revealed themselves to define the relationship between the pair in accordance with its traditional stereotype. In order to differentiate between the individual dynamics and the format's discourse, the power dynamics in the shows were analyzed under separate headings consisting of; the format, the host and the contestants. The two shows were approached and analyzed as different cases as their format elements differ from each other despite both of them being daytime cooking competitions featuring the MIL and DIL pairs.

According to the hierarchy of *Gelinim Mutfakta*, the MILs are positioned higher than the DILs whereas the host is positioned as above them all. While the conflict between the MILs and the DILs are highlighted by format elements such as editing, in the individual dynamics between the pairs, the companionship is revealed to outweigh the conflict. Due to its excessive editing, studio design, visual aesthetic and the long-running contestants, the narrative of this show resembles to that of a primetime reality

show. The studio consisting of two sections similar to a living room and a kitchen, imitates a household. In this household, the DILs are positioned in the kitchen, cooking for their MILs whereas the MILs are positioned in the living room, sitting and watching their DILs. This house-like design also serves to the discourse that associates women with domestic and private spheres. The living room of the MILs have a viewing window in order for them to surveil their DILs in the kitchen. The DILs are not the only ones surveilled, however, as the MILs too are surveilled by the format of show and surveillance in general holds a prominent place in the format's structure.

The host of the show, Fatih Ürek -who was replaced in the third season- as a famous queer singer holds a peculiar position of being the voice of patriarchy through his interactions with the contestants. His screen persona and the narrative of the show together position him as an expert on intra-familial relations. Fatih Ürek's own identity as a gay singer and the transformation of this identity in the past twenty years, in order to comply with the family regime of the AKP government also affects his screen persona immensely. His attempt of reconstructing his gender identity to be acceptable by the heteronormative neo-conservative standards still reveals itself through his opinions on womanhood and female body which bear striking resemblance to the biopolitics of the AKP.

Fatih Ürek's flamboyant screen persona is essential for encoding the show's space as a feminine one yet interestingly enough, as a queer singer who is identified as male, he is positioned higher than the contestants all of whom were identified as females. Furthermore, his advices about how the relationship between the MIL and the DIL should be do not come from his own experience as he is neither ever been married nor a female. Yet his expert status which is not questioned by the contestants reveals that being female is positioned pejoratively by the discourse system of the format.

The show is broadcast in the time slot between 13:00 and 16:00, making it a mid-daytime show whose audience is assumed to mostly consist of women. In accordance with this assumption, the audience of *Gelinim Mutfakta* is referred as ‘ladies’ and also treated as subordinates of the host. In addition to giving advices about intra-familial relations, the host also gives recipe tips to the audience despite having no valid experience in cooking. His addressing them and rhetoric strategies while communicating with them implies to an intimate yet authoritative relationship. This relationship established is utilized by advertisements sections where the host is seen praising the sponsored products with the same attitude.

The individual power dynamics between the MIL and DIL pairs of the show, is implied to resemble the format’s perception of it, meaning that, in many aspects, the MILs are positioned higher than the DILs. Despite the format’s desire to highlight this power dynamic, the individual accounts and actions of the contestants create an alternative narrative about a certain kind of companionship between the pair. Both parties of these pairs share the same painful experience of having to leave your birth-family behind in order to – both legally and socially- become part of the family of your husband and this experience acts as a common ground for mutual understanding in some instances.

The conflict rising between the pairs are usually the results of the format elements pitting them against each other such as hypothetical questions and video-clip screenings. Even during these instances, the MIL and DIL pairs are mostly seen defending each other against the other people in the show, also justified by the fact that they are competing as a team, after all. The format’s instancy on creating a conflict between the pair while also reprimanding them for not acting like a mother-daughter pair are all manifestation of the public confusion regarding this relationship.

In *Zuhal Topal'la Sofrada*, the individual accounts of the contestants and the format's discourse contravene even more. The format of *Zuhal Topal'la Sofrada* resembles the marriage show format more than a traditional reality show. Despite borrowing prominent elements such as confessionals and off-screen narrator, the narrative of the show relies on the unpolished presence of the ordinary people as contestants. The contestant pairs only appear for a week in this show and the MILs are the leads of this format as they are the ones who are present for all days of the week.

The host and also the co-producer, Zuhal Topal, is a famous marriage show host/actress whose persona heavily relies on her image as a good wife and a good mother. Similar to Fatih Ürek, she is also positioned as the highest in terms of power hierarchy of the format. Zuhal Topal's host persona may be said to consist of two different personas revealing itself in different stages of the show. In the beginning of the day, before the dinner, she positions herself as an affectionate house guest full of jokes whereas in the dinner stage she acts as a final jury, establishing justice for the show. Both faces of this persona are consolidated by her own identity; the first from her identity as a happily-married mother and the other is the co-owner of a family production company. Her relationship with the audience, however, differs from Fatih Ürek's in the sense that it prioritizes respect over intimacy. She addresses the audience as 'ladies' and 'gentlemen' which indicates that the assumed audience is not female only. This difference can be due to the time slots these shows are airing. *Zuhal Topal'la Sofrada* airs between 16:00 and 19:00, just before the slot of evening news. So its proximity to primetime may be read as the reason why a more formal relationship is established with the viewers.

Zuhal Topal together with the Mixer, the off-voice co-host persona of the show, act as agents of patriarchal order, always reminding the contestants about the 'proper' and 'normal' way to do things, regarding their relationship. Despite the show format and the hosts' positioning the MILs higher than the DILs, the individual dynamics between

the pairs in this show hint to a more fluctuating dynamic. During the brief period where the pairs are displayed together, despite the continuous efforts of both the Mixer and the host, their harmony and companionship stand out. Through its diverse cast, different relationship dynamics become visible. These different dynamics are however, harshly criticized by hosts and the other contestants revealing that despite individual experiences, the relationship between the pair is still defined through the traditional stereotypes that positions the pair in a keenly structured power hierarchy.

When these two shows are taken into consideration, the affinity and companionship between the pairs are revealed through individual narratives whereas the conflict between them is highlighted by the formats' discourse. In addition, while the formats point to a sharp power dynamic in which the MILs are positioned above the DILs, the individual accounts imply a more fluctuating dynamic. As television shows, reality shows in particular, rely heavily on conflict as a narrative tool, their insistence on pitting these women against each other is justified to an extent.

The instances where the rather unconventional representations of this relationship that subverts the dominant discourse, are reprimanded by the hosts imply to a narrative in accordance with the family regime of the AKP where women, especially the younger women, are positioned as care-givers of the family. However, it is still promising that, an alternative discourse about what it means to be a MIL or a DIL and how the relationship between a MIL and a DIL should be, is constructed by the MILs and DILs themselves opposing the dominant discourse. The identities of DIL and MIL are reconstructed and the common stereotypes about this relationship is subverted through these representations on daytime screens.

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## Appendix A

The lyrics of the opening song of *Evimiz Olacak mı?*

Seda Sayan, *Kaynana No.1*, **Kaynana No.2**

Kaynanalar bir değil, iki.  
Evimiz olacak mı?  
Dize gelmem ısrar etme!  
Evimiz olacak mı?  
Kaynanasız dırdırsız  
Evimiz olacak mı?  
Rezil olduk elaleme  
Evimiz olacak mı?

Yemeği pişiren ben  
*Yan gelip yatan sen*  
Kaynanayı çeken ben  
**Dizi filmi seyreden sen**  
Gece gündüz çalışan ben  
*İkimizi hor gören sen*  
İtilip kakılan ben  
**Hazıra da konan sen**

Yemeği pişiren ben  
*Yan gelip yatan sen*  
Kaynanayı çeken ben  
*Dizi filmi seyreden sen*  
Gece gündüz çalışan ben  
*İkimizi hor gören sen*  
İtilip kakılan ben  
*Hazıra da konan sen*

Kaynanalar bir değil, iki.  
Evimiz olacak mı?  
Dize gelmem ısrar etme!  
Evimiz olacak mı?  
Kaynanasız dırdırsız  
Evimiz olacak mı?  
Rezil olduk elaleme  
Evimiz olacak mı?

## Appendix B

The lyrics of *Gelinim Mutfakta*'s opening song

Gelinim mutfakta (x2)

Yemeđi tabakta, tadı damakta gelinim  
mutfakta

Gelinim mutfakta (x2)

Üstüne yok lezzeti bulmakta

Masayı donatıp kurmakta

Sanat eseri gibi sunmakta

Gelinim mutfakta (x2)

Gelinim mutfakta (x2)

Yemeđi tabakta, tadı damakta gelinim  
mutfakta

Gelinim mutfakta (x2)

Yemeđi tabakta, tadı damakta gelinim  
mutfakta

## Appendix C

The dialog happened in the episode dated 10 December 2018

**Fatih:** Bir dakika. Bu çocukları biz evlendirelim, büyütelim bizim için çalışsınlar-

**Ziyafet:** Tabii ki-

**Fatih:** (*Parmağını kaldırarak*) Bakın. Burada biz televizyonda program yapıyoruz.

**Ziyafet:** Tamam yapın. Doğru konuşuyorum.

**Fatih:** Bu bir yanlış mesajdır. Çocuklar doğarlar, büyürler, annenin babanın görevidir bu. Sonra o çocuklar bizim için çalışacaklar, bize bakacaklar, kazandıklarını bize verecekler veyahut da evlendiklerinde takılan altınları bize- Bunlar çok yanlış şeyler.

## Appendix D

The dialog happened in the episode dated 12 December 2018

**Fatih Ürek:** (*Ziyafet'in yöresel şivesini taklit ederek*) Bak şimdi bunu yiyeceksin 'Ben bilmirem' dedin ya. (*Tabaklardan birini göstererek*) Al bak bu nasıl bir şeymiş, bu nasıl güzel bir şeymiş ye gör. (*Ziyafet'in gelini Elif'i işaret ederek*) Bundan sonra Elif de hep yapacakmış sana.

**Ziyafet:** (*Kuşkuyla*) Hiç yapmadı görmedim de.

**Fatih Ürek:** Kız nerde yapacak? Burada öğrendi zaten kız.

**Ziyafet:** (*Sitem ederek*) Ama başka bir şey yapsın, çağırsın beni eve.

**Fatih Ürek:** (*Elif'e doğru bir eli belinde*) Niye çağırmıyorsun sen bu kadını?

**Ziyafet:** (*Devam eder*) Mantı yapsın, börek yapsın.

**Fatih:** (*Diğer yarışmacılara dönerek*) Hep –hiç başka bir şey yok mantı, börek. (*Cümleye nokta koyar gibi elini masaya vurur*)

**Ziyafet:** Biz onu yeriz, ne yiyeceğiz? Ardahanlı ne yiyecek?

**Fatih:** Su böreği? Yapıyor musun kız? Üşenmesem açarım valla.

## Appendix E

The dialog happened in the episode dated 18 May 2020

**Elif:** Hayır annem mesela yok ya, bir gün telefon açıp ‘Kızım bir şeye ihtiyacın var mı?’ diye sormadın.

**Çiğdem:** Olmadığımı biliyorum.

**Elif:** Ama bak kendi kafanda yaşıyorsun. Alma-

**Çiğdem:** Canım benim ben onu oğlumla zaten paylaşıyorum-

**Elif:** Ben neyim?

**Çiğdem:** Ben bunu sana yansıtmıyorum ki.

**Elif:** Ben de yansımayanı söylüyorum işte. Mesela şey diye düşünüyorum: Annem yok burada. Bir gün kayınvalidem de telefon açıp ‘Bir şeye ihtiyacınız var mı? Canınız bir şey çekiyor mu?’ diye sormuyor. Ben de üstten baştan... Sen bana düğün yapıyorsun ama sadece bana yapmıyorsun. Kendi namına yapıyorsun.

**Fatih:** Bir şey söyleyeceğim. Elif’ciğim sen ‘Bana böyle çok bireysel bir şey yapmadın’ mı demek istiyorsun?

**Elif:** Evet onu kastettim aslında. Bana bireysel bir şey olmadı.

**Çiğdem:** Fatih Bey ne yapabilirim? Hiçbir eksigi yokken ben ne yapabilirim?

**Fatih:** (*Elif’i göstererek*) Nerden biliyorsun diyor.

**Çiğdem:** Ama biliyorum. Bakın mesela ben oğlumla da konuşuyorum. ‘Oğlum bir şeye ihtiyacınız var mı?’ diyorum. ‘Yok anne’ diyor. Ben gelinime yansıtmadan bunu zaten arkada oğlumla konuşuyorum.

**Fatih:** Ama o da diyor ki (*Elif’i işaret ederek*) ‘Benim niye haberim yok?’.

## Apendix F

The dialog in the YouTube video dated 20 April 2018, titled “Fatih Ürek, Hüsniye Hanıma neden ıkıřtı?”

**Sevgül:** Bizdekiler kaynanalık yapmıř da biz řimdi kaynanalık yapamıyoruz.

**ıđdem:** Deđiliz biz. Ben kendimi kaynana olarak görmüyorum-

**Müzeyyen:** Ben bir arkadař olarak görüyorum.

**ıđdem:** Gerçekten hi görmüyorum yani. Çünkü öyle bir kayınvalidelik veya kaynanalık yapmıyorum.

**Hüsniye:** Yani arkadař olmaz da arkadař gibi diyelim. Çünkü arkadař olamaz gelin ile kaynana arkadař olamazlar. Arkadař gibi olurlar çünkü arada bir makam, rütbe farkı var. Aslında budur yani. Hani gelinin de evlenmiř, gelin olmuř kendi bir makamı, rütbesi olmuř. Kaynana ondan bir üst rütbedir. Ama kayınvalide tabi daha üst makamda olduđu için daha fazla konuřur. Gelin kayınvalideden fazla konuřursa olmaz.

## Appendix G

The original quote from Fatih Ürek's interview in the Magazine newspaper *Kelebek*, dated back to 2000.

“Aslında bizim halkımız çok hoşgörülü. Sanatın ve sanatçının her türüsüne çok saygı gösteriyorlar. Bir insan eşcinselse ya da biseksüelse bunu insanların gözüne sokmasına gerek yok. Ben sokmadığım için beni seviyorlar. Yalnız büyük şehirlerde değil Anadolu'da da çok sevenim var. Bir sürü transseksüel, travesti asosyal insan kendilerini çok göze soktular. Artık bu işin ucunu kaçırdılar. Ben ona da karşıyım. (...) Ben toplumla savaşmak istemiyorum. Sevgilimle yaşadıklarım dört duvar arasında kalmalı. Öyle el ele gezmeleri filan aştım ben. Eşcinsellik hakları için savaşmam. Çok düşündüm ve çözdüm, gerek yok böyle şeylere. Türkiye'de yaşamaktan son derece memnunum. Kendimi rahat ve özgür hissediyorum. Kendimi çok deşifre etmedikten, dejenere olmadıktan sonra neden rahatsız olayım. Bir şey hep gözden kaçıyor. Bu ülkede bir Zeki Müren gerçeği yaşandı. Halk onu hiç didiklemeden kabul etti.”